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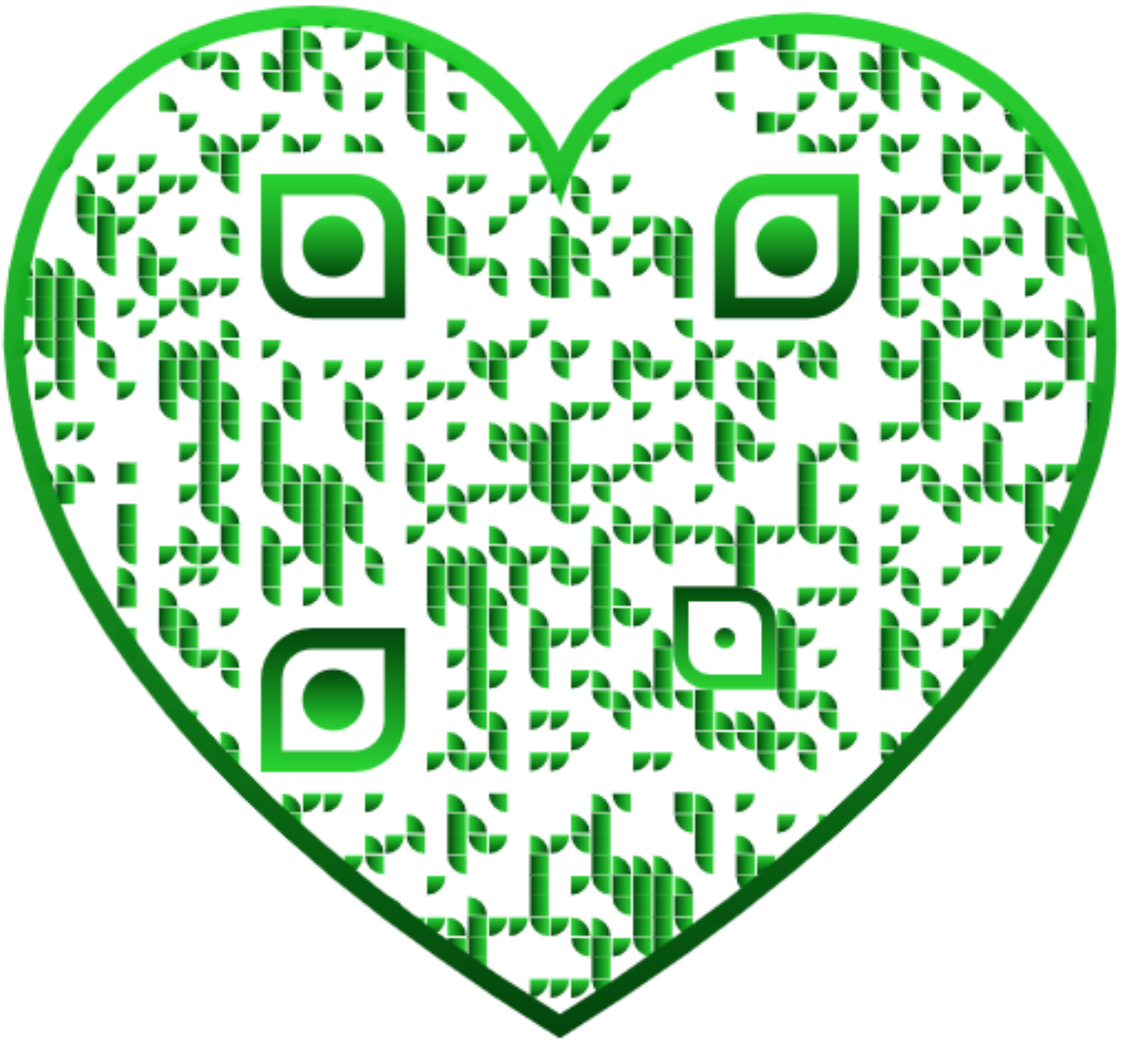

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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Email **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com**

www.theguitarmagazine.com

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com
Art Editor **John Thackray**
john.thackray@anthem-publishing.com
Managing Editor **Josh Gardner**
josh.gardner@anthem-publishing.com
Senior Product Specialist **Huw Price**
huw.price@anthem-publishing.com
Digital Manager **Andy Price**
andy.price@anthem-publishing.com
Digital Editor **Sam Roberts**
sam.roberts@anthem-publishing.com
Contributors **Simon Bradley, Rod Fogg, Michael Heatley, Dave Hunter, Gareth John, Richard Purvis, Michael Stephens, James Stevens**

Instrument & Cover Photography **Eleanor Jane**
Managing Director **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

ADVERTISING
Business Development Manager **Di Marsh**
di.marsh@anthem-publishing.com
Senior Sales Executive **Joe Supple**
joe.supple@anthem-publishing.com
Sales Executive **Will Pitts**
will.pitts@anthem-publishing.com
Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING
CEO **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com
Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com
Marketing & Production Manager **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION
Print **William Gibbons & Sons Ltd**
Tel 01902 730011
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5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Tel +44 (0) 203 787 9001

LICENSING
Regina Erak **07753 811622**
erak@globalworks.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES
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Tel **0844 322 1291*** (UK)
Tel **800 428 3003** (US Toll Free)
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Strat For The Future

How many products do you own with a design that's remained relatively unchanged, despite being in continuous production for over 60 years? And if you took a model from the first year of manufacture, would it still be fit for purpose? Would it be one of the finest examples of its type? There's little doubt that the Fender Stratocaster is one of the most iconic designs of the 20th Century and the old cliché still holds true: if you ask someone who isn't a guitar player to draw a picture of an electric guitar, they'll likely scrawl something that resembles a Strat.

Yet for all its familiarity, there's still something mysterious and otherworldly about the solidbody electric guitar that Leo Fender, Freddie Tavares, George Fullerton and Bill Carson collaborated on all those years ago. The interplay of the various elements works beautifully when properly set-up but oh boy, can it quickly go awry in the wrong hands. I'll spare you the hair-raising details, but suffice to say that, at the age of about 14, your correspondent rendered a Squier Strat unplayable by trying to fix choke-out with a claw hammer.

It isn't the kind of mistake you make twice, and if I'd been able to get my hands on something similar to this month's cover feature, I probably wouldn't have made it at all. Whether you are a teenager with a hammer or an experienced fettler of electric guitars, there's plenty to learn from our ultimate guide to Strat tone. Turn to p26 to find out about the physical factors that influence the way your guitar sounds, get setup and upgrade tips, read about how legendary Strat tones were recorded and much more besides. And if you have a golden setup tip for a Strat or any other guitar then please write to theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com and let us know – we'll print the best. See you next month...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

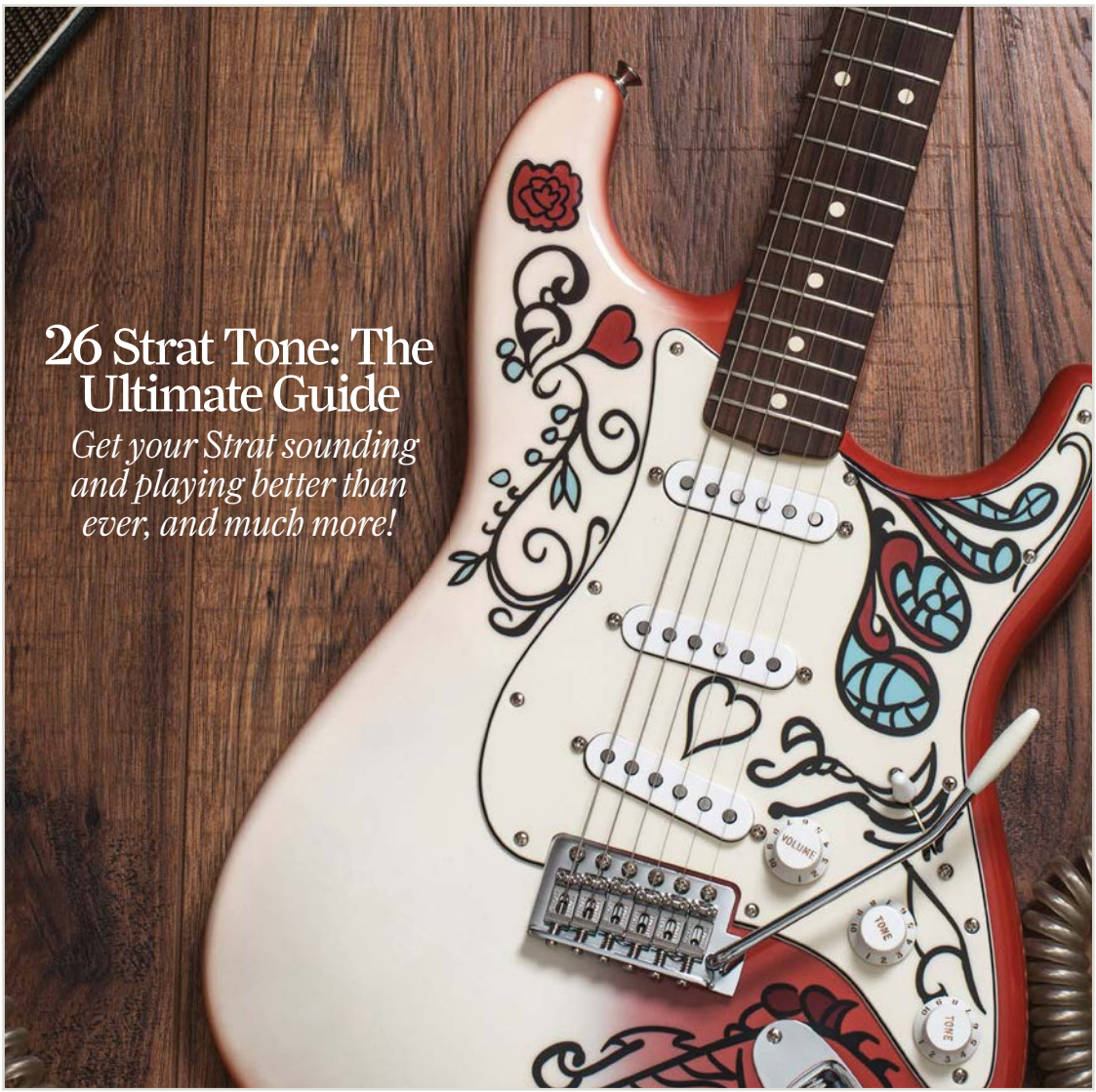
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p12

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker



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THE *Money Shot*

1957 GIBSON ES-350T

Gibson's records indicate that just 74 ES-350T instruments were shipped with a natural finish in 1957, and this gorgeous electric hollowbody is one such example. Introduced two years earlier, the thinline ES-350T superseded the full-depth ES-350 in response to player requests for something between a full hollowbody and a compact solidbody. Chuck Berry was an early adopter, using a P-90 loaded model for his legendary early Chess recordings, then switching to the PAF humbucker version on its arrival in 1957. Notable features include a 23.5-inch scale length and a narrow fingerboard spacing (along with narrow-spaced PAFs) designed to help jazz players with those hard-to-reach chord shapes. This guitar features in the next Gardiner Houlgate guitar auction on 14 September 2017 and, aside from a hairline crack repair to the treble side and the expected playwear, checking and dings, it's in nice condition for a 60-year-old guitar. Hear it in action at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and visit guitar-auctions.co.uk for more.

Gibson

WIN A JHS Pedals VCR Ryan Adams WORTH £259!

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The JHS VCR is an intriguing pedal from the Kansas City-based boutique effects maker, and not just because of the A-list associations – although partnering up with Ryan Adams certainly hasn't hurt the general interest in this gloriously 80s-vibed three-in-one package.

The VCR is designed to capture the essence of Adams' lush clean tones and does so by combining reverb, chorus and boost in flavours informed by 1980s guitar icons Johnny Marr of The Smiths and The Cure's Robert Smith, to create what Adams calls an 'Ultracolor Volume/Chorus/Reverb'.

Operation is simple – you get a single rotary control for each effect, and a mini-toggle switch to determine whether the effect will be active when you stomp on the single footswitch. To make things even more old-school, there's also a switchable 'lo-fi' mode that cuts low and high frequencies from the effected signal.

We looked at the VCR last month, with Syd Edwards concluding that it was a, "A great sounding three-in-one solution for those who don't need a huge pedalboard". To find out more, visit www.jhspedals.com, and to be in with a chance of winning one yourself, simply answer the question below and head to the following link:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/vcr

Competition question:
Ryan Adams' *1989* album is a track-by-track cover of which pop artist's record of the same name?
A Britney Spears **B** Taylor Swift **C** Katy Perry

CLEAN CUT KID

With star-crossed songwriters and pop hooks in spades, Liverpool's Clean Cut Kid are making waves. **JOSH GARDNER** gets down with the kids...

There are plenty of guitar-pop bands singing catchy songs about love and relationships, but very few of them can sell it as believably as Clean Cut Kid's two vocalists Mike and Evelyn Halls – and there's a very good reason for that.

"It all started when Ev and I were set up on a date!" exclaims Mike, who is also the band's sole guitarist. "I'd been doing the session thing for eight years, and she was developing as a solo artist. We pretty much began making music together from our second date!"

With the addition of bassist Saul Godman and Ross Higginson, Clean Cut Kid was born, and have set about crafting a reputation for infectious, high-energy guitar music that wears its heart on its sleeve – a brew that has seen them gain a major label deal, Radio 1 airplay, and a dedicated following in the process.

"I've always been obsessed with 'trimming the fat'," explains Mike of the urgency and directness of tunes such as *Vitamin C*. "There's something so electrifying about finding the perfect few lines to nail a complex concept."

Clean Cut Kid further stand out thanks to a refusal to minimise or sideline the guitar in their sound, and this comes from a desire to put interesting six-string back on the airwaves.

"I hate smooth guitar sounds, in fact the reason I started Clean Cut Kid was an antidote to how 'uncool' guitar felt in modern music," Mike affirms. "I use vintage fuzzes: purely for how much you have to fight with them!"

After generating a buzz online, CCK headed into the studio to record their debut album, *FELT*, which allowed Mike to truly show off his guitar nerd tendencies. "I have A LOT of gear, so we used a massive amount across the record," he exclaims. "I've also done thousands of hours in the studio as a session guitarist, so there was lots of crazy stuff I was keen to use!"

"For example, for the *Vitamin C* guitar sound, you take a 1964 Mustang – with *really* worn out low-output pickups – and drop the pickups as low as they'll go. Then you go into a JHS Bun Runner and then into a Smokey amp which you rewire to use as a preamp, then you run all of that into a dimed 60s Vox AC30. Basically, you need to slam the guitar to even open the gate on the fuzz, but when it does open... you get a dimed Vox with an added preamp stage which is ripping holes in the studio walls!"

Clearly Mike is very particular about his guitar sound, then, but he's also relentless about pushing himself technically – as his preference for short-scale guitars attests.

"I've been using a 60s Mustang a lot recently," Mike explains. "I'll spend a year on Les Pauls, then Coronets then vintage Fenders, et cetera – just to keep challenging how I approach playing guitar. I love players who mimic vocal phrasing. I find with short-scale guitars you have increased bending capabilities. They make me reach for 'impossible' bends a lot more: something which gets you away from using the same boring old shapes and patterns."

With a mindset like that, it's no wonder that Clean Cut Kid feel like a breath of air in an often generic guitar-pop landscape.

Clean Cut Kid's debut album, *FELT* is out now on Babe Magnet Records

© Getty Images

GLEN CAMPBELL

1936-2017

When Glen Campbell died from Alzheimer's disease on 8 August 2017, the tributes were as expansive as his passing was expected. No matter how sad the reality of the situation was, everyone knew it was coming. Yet for all the salutes to a stellar career in pop-country, Campbell's musicianship was still skated over. Because it's no exaggeration to say that Glen Travis Campbell had one of the most remarkable careers of any guitarist of the 20th century.

Campbell was just four when his father ordered him a 3/4-size $5 guitar from Sears & Roebuck, and he was performing on local radio aged six. By 12, he was semi-pro in what he called "fightin' and dancin' clubs". By his early 20s, Campbell had become a member of LA's lauded Wrecking Crew, and was soon playing incognito on a slew of smashes – The Righteous Brothers' *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'*, Sinatra's *Strangers In The Night*, Elvis's *Viva Las Vegas* soundtrack, The Monkees' debut LP, six tracks on *Pet Sounds*, Ricky Nelson, Dean Martin, Merle Haggard... And that was just the famous tip of a reverberatin' iceberg: in 1963 alone, Campbell played and sang on a staggering 586 recorded songs.

His career as a sessioneer was all the more remarkable given that Campbell didn't read music, he could just instinctively *play*. Fellow Wrecking Crew member Leon Russell later called Campbell, "The best guitar player I'd heard, before or since."

He'd tried to get wider notice for his chops, but solo LPs *The Big Bad Rock Guitar Of...* and *The Astounding 12-String Guitar Of Glen Campbell* failed to fly, and when he became a solo star with *that* honeyed voice, Campbell's guitar (and mandolin and banjo) took a back seat. But not always – on *The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour* TV show he'd shred away, as *Classical Gas* became a calling card – and in a hairier genre his string-sparring with Jerry Reed would be called "face melting." Campbell didn't call it that, of course: "I call it playin' take-off!" According to Campbell's golfing buddy Alice Cooper, Eddie Van Halen once asked if he could get lessons from Glen.

For all his TV bonhomie, Campbell took guitar very seriously – he was a key driver in Ovation developing an onboard pickup system, as he hated having a microphone in front of his guitar on primetime. But Campbell was an all-round entertainer with depth. Once asked who his musical hero was, the man painted as a 'Rhinestone Cowboy' offered: "Django Reinhardt. Best guitar player that ever lived. He and Stephane Grappelli gave us some of the best playing I've ever heard, and they did that in the 30s. He was a mad player. It inspired me. It really did make me want to play like that." And Glen Campbell, in his own unique and golden way, surely did.

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DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

HEATLEY RETRO-MATIC

Scott Heatley started out making guitars in a shed two decades ago, but as his reputation for stunning retro-styled instruments has rapidly outgrown these humble origins. **DAVE HUNTER** examines one of his creations...

Photos by Todd Harris

There are so many great small-shop guitar makers out there that it's really difficult to know who's got real talent and staying power, and who is just doing a decent job of turning out nifty looking instruments but doesn't have that spark of ingenuity you need to make a go of it long term. For over 20 years now, Scott Heatley has proven a strong swimmer. And if there's any justice in the guitar world he'll continue powering elegantly across the surface of these turbulent waters, succeeding on the strength of one gorgeous, toneful, and superbly playable build after another.

Heatley makes his home in British Columbia, Canada, where his workshop has grown from the shed-sized room he started out in back in 1997 to a well-equipped facility with modern CNC technology that's fit for the most discerning luthier. His standard line-up consists of three models – the Retro-Matic (which I'll be looking at here), the Tradition, and the Parisienne. That doesn't mean his guitars are off the peg, however – Scott builds the majority of his guitars to order, and all are essentially one-offs, with specs, features and finishes that are rarely repeated from one to the next.

I first experienced what this builder is capable of when I played Heatley's smaller and more affordable Parisienne model a few years ago, and I fell in love with the results. That guitar had irresistibly flashy looks, while also being fairly simple and straightforward in many respects, but paid out in spades with unstoppable tone and dynamics, proving itself a real workhorse in the guise of a showpiece guitar.

If you're at all enamoured of 50s and 60s custom colours and Americana-kitsch, prepare to fall in love

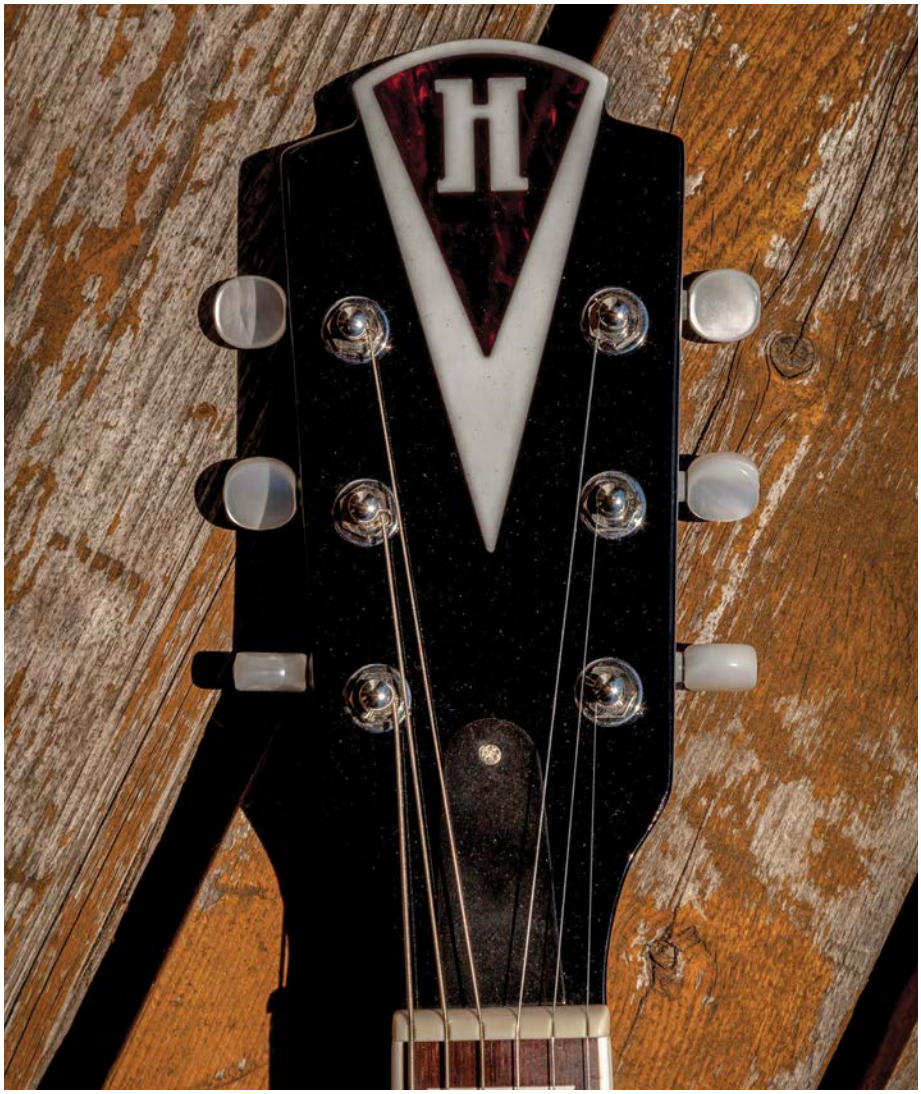
The Retro-Matic is the bigger-bodied realisation of Heatley's semi-Gretsch/semi-catalogue-guitar-inspired vision, and the cornerstone of his line. Put it like this: if you're at all enamoured of 50s and 60s custom colours and Americana-kitsch redolent of Kelvinator headstocks and other diner-era-inspired cosmetics, prepare to fall in love. There's more than the looks to hook you with this guitar, for sure – and other Heatleys besides – but it's likely the eye candy that will lure you in the first place, making the faultless playing feel and rich, juicy, vintage-like sound extremely pleasant surprises.

Like many modern makers who seek light and lively tonewoods, Heatley has turned on to korina in a big way, and we find it both in this Retro-Matic's semi-hollow body and glued-in neck. The entire guitar

KEY FEATURES

Heatley Retro-Matic

- **PRICE** Starting at $3,000 (approx £2,300 plus shipping and any duties)
- **BODY** Semi-hollow korina with Heatley soundhole
- **NECK** 1-piece, glued-in korina with full, rounded '59 profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Cocobolo, 12" radius, 24.75" scale length
- **FRETS** 22, jumbo
- **NUT** Bone, 1.69"
- **PICKUPS** Wolfetone Mean and Meaner P-90s
- **ELECTRONICS** Individual tone and volume controls, 3-way toggle switch
- **FINISH** Pelham Blue
- **HARDWARE** Hipshot open-back tuners, ABM tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece
- **STRINGS** D'Addario 0.010–0.046
- **CONTACT** www.heatleyguitars.com



wears a nitrocellulose finish in lightly metallic Pelham Blue, which is beautifully contrasted by white binding around the body top and fingerboard, white pickguard, white plastic P-90 covers, and tasty white 'cupcake' knobs, all tweaked by a further touch of originality in Heatley's elegant segmented soundhole. And, while the maker offers a subtler option, I find his 'Big-H' headstock, as found on this one, an essential element of the design aesthetic – big, sure, as the name states, but it's far from clunky looking, and in fact it brings balance to the lines, while tracing a path to those catalogue guitars mentioned earlier and their own 50s fridge-inspired cosmetics.

This neck, in fact, is a beauty from every angle; I love Heatley's rounded '59 profile (measuring 0.9 inches deep at the first fret and 0.99 inches at the 12th), which feels totally 'of the era' in the hand, and the trapezoid-outline inlays in the dark reddish-brown cocobolo fingerboard lend a further custom touch to the overall look. The heel is tapered away just enough to allow optimum access to the upper frets without introducing any overly contrasting modernity to the lines, and the entire thing feels flawless in the hand.

You really couldn't ask for better fretwork or a more on-the-money setup, and while the Retro-Matic might hint at aesthetics out of the warehouse at Sears, Roebuck & Company, the fit, finish and playability are elevated stratospherically beyond that. Much like the Parisienne model I fell for a few years ago, the first impression that this Retro-Matic was built mainly for show is quickly belied by the feel and responsiveness once you get it in hand. Although it's the largest body size Heatley offers, this guitar is not at all unwieldy in size, and it both sits and hangs

Heatley offers a less showy headstock if you want it, but the 'Big H' is a much more striking and unique design

The two-ported soundhole is a unique feature of Heatley's retro-styled guitars

far more nimbly than, say, an ES-335 or a Gretsch 6120 – and more than that, it's just a monster player in every respect.

Hardware at the body end is pretty standard stuff (though of good quality) in a German-made ABM tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece. The headstock sports a set of open-back Sperzel tuners with pearloid buttons, beyond a hand-carved bone nut. Pickup maker Wolfe Macleod is probably better known for his Dr Vintage, Legend, and Marshall Head humbuckers, but I've been impressed with Wolfetone P-90s in the past, and the Mean and Meaner set (neck and bridge respectively) should partner well with this guitar as spec'd so far.

Played unplugged, you can feel the korina's lively vibration through your left hand and solar plexus alike, sensations that tend to bode extremely well in an amped-up instrument. The Retro-Matic projects a lot of acoustic volume for a thinline semi-hollow guitar, too, making it a great 'couch guitar' just as it stands. Plugged into a custom JTM45-style head and 2x12 cab, a 65amps Producer EL and 2x12 cab, and a custom 5E3 tweed Deluxe-style combo, the guitar revealed a rich and powerful amplified voice, and surprising versatility. It's a light guitar at around 7lbs, but its sound is far from 'lightweight'; lows are full without being boomy, while mids are confident and textured. The guitar has a churning, swirling, effervescent soundstage overall – a voice redolent of korina's nimble resonance – lending a three-dimensionality resplendent with harmonic sparkle to just about everything.

If all that implies it's a tame beast, however, don't be fooled: there's lots of sting and growl when played into a driven amp, all couched in that characteristically edgy, granular P-90 oomph, and the Retro-Matic is very much a rock 'n' roller at heart, even if it will do plenty more when bidden.

Hit it hard and this guitar can be aggressive and biting, yet always with a compelling pillow of compression and some snarly smoothness from the korina-and-P-90s stew (which I've often found a magic combination). It all contributes to sweet, silky highs and no hint of harshness, even when you're pushing pretty heavy distortion through the amp or via an overdrive or fuzz pedal.

Even at medium-gain settings via, for example, an Xotic BB Preamp or a Gurus SexyDrive II pedal it's easy to coax hovering, harmonic feedback that's impressively controllable, with no squeal unless you get silly about your proximity to the amp. Clean up a little at the guitar's volume, and it will twang out confident honky-tonk from the bridge pickup or warm, rich Grant Green-certified 60s jazz tones from the neck.

This is one hip, fun, and extremely accomplished guitar, and it's a considerable bargain at this price, amid a field crowded with similar small-shop offerings commonly going at twice the ticket and more.

THE MAN WHO DROVE A NAIL

with a dream.

MARTY WAS AN ASPIRING SONGWRITER. ONE DAY, HE DECIDED TO HAMMER A NAIL INTO A WALL. "THIS IS WHERE I WILL HANG MY FIRST GOLD RECORD," HE DECLARED—WHICH WAS A BOLD PROCLAMATION, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM A GUY WHOSE NEXT BEST OPTION WAS A JOB WRITING TOASTER MANUALS. FOR SIX LONG YEARS HE WALKED BY THAT EMPTY NAIL. AND SO DID HIS WIFE AND THREE KIDS. THIS TOOK GUTS. PARTICULARLY AFTER EATING MASHED POTATOES COVERED IN 69-CENT GRAVY FROM A PACKET. BUT MARTY PERSEVERED. FOCUSED ON SUCCESS. UNTIL ONE DAY, A GOLD RECORD HUNG ON THAT NAIL, AND THEN A PLATINUM NEXT TO IT. HIS STORY REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD COULD USE MORE DREAMERS LIKE MARTY. *For more on Marty and other stories of courage that inspire us, visit taylorguitars.com*

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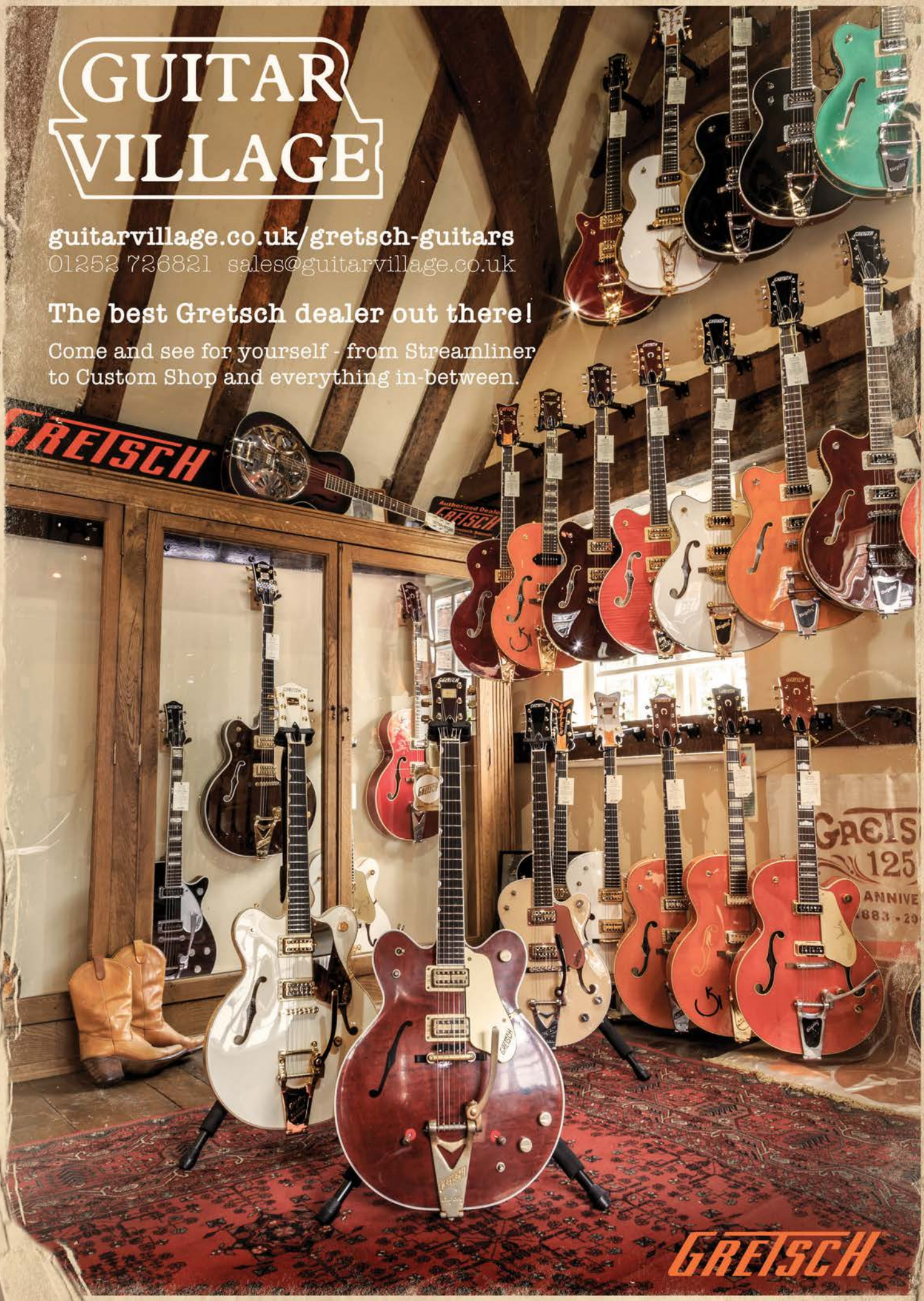
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Summer NAMM saw Taylor Guitars bolster its array of fine 12-string models with the small-bodied 362CE & 352CE

Summer NAMM 17

July saw us head to the bright lights of Nashville, Tennessee in order to peruse a glittering array of new gear from the great and good of Guitardom. Want to see even more? Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to see video demos from the show floor...

Photography **Joe Supple**

T-Rex follows up its pedalboard-friendly tape echo with an even more compact Junior version

Fender's hand-wired '64 Custom Deluxe Reverb recreates one of the most recorded amps of all time

The Fender Justin Meldal-Johnsen Road Worn Mustang Bass

Blackstar's MkII versions of the company's popular HT Venue amps are set to land in stores soon

Radiohead's Ed O'Brien collaborated with Fender on the EOB Sustainer Stratocaster, set to land in November

The Gretsch G6118T Players Edition Anniversary in beautiful Iridium Silver/Azure Metallic two-tone

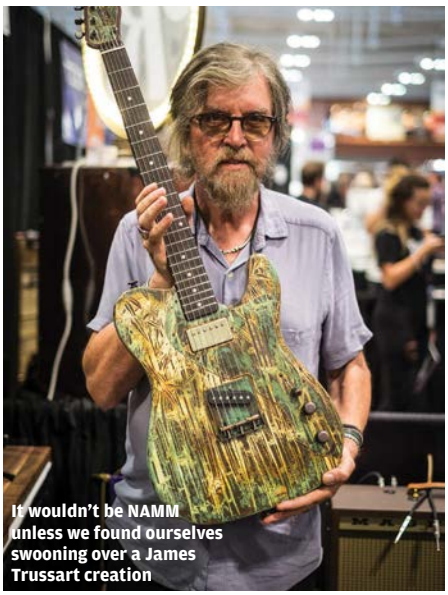
The Carbon Copy Deluxe sees MXR add tap-tempo and a bright mode

The ingenious SAMSystems Integral IM close mic'ing system

Does Robert Keeley ever stop innovating? Here's version two of his Caverns reverb/delay

Fancy a $99 Les Paul? Here's Epiphone's ludicrously affordable Les Paul SL

Swope Guitars brought highly-evolved offsets to Summer NAMM



It wouldn't be NAMM unless we found ourselves swooning over a James Trussart creation

Way Huge Doubleland Special

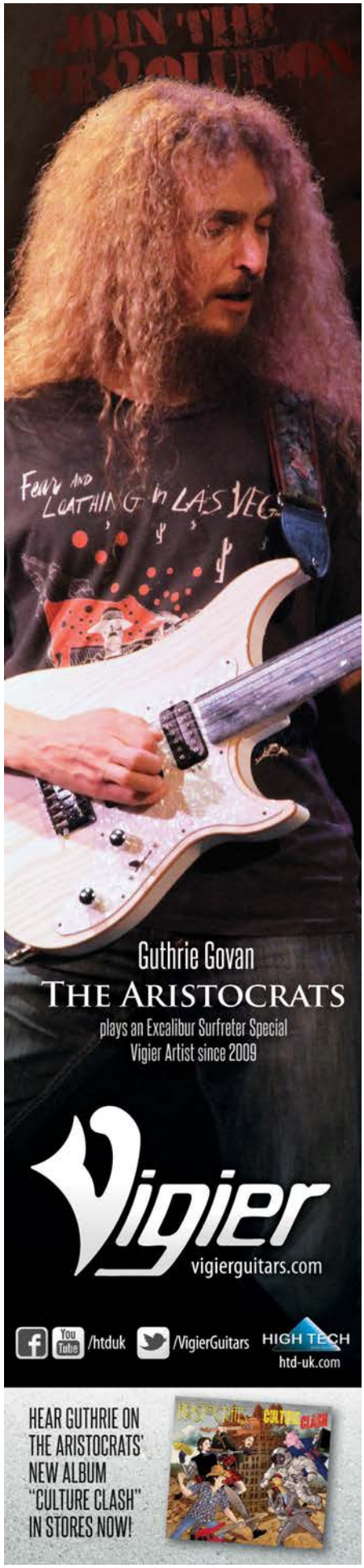
Way Huge's latest collaboration between Jeorge Tripps and Joe Bonamassa was launched at Summer NAMM and is a follow-up to the Overrated Special. We get the skinny from Mr Bonamassa himself...

"The Overrated Special was designed for when I switched from Marshall and Dumble over to tweed amps. It's a beautiful pedal because it's already designed to work with an already overdriven amp – when I play the tweeds, they're already set for nine and a half. So the Overrated Special is just a nice nudge on the bottom side – it gives you a little more gain, it gives you a little nudge under 500Hz – and it just gives a nice big weight to the tone.

"But, unfortunately, I switch now between Fender and Gibson, and sometimes the Fenders require a little more gain and a little less treble, and sometimes the Gibsons require a little less gain and a little more treble. And so the idea was based on the Camel Toe, which is basically a Red Llama and a Green Rhino, run into each other. This is two Overrated Specials, identical, run into each other. You can run them in parallel or series, but I'm not the kind of guy who needs two overdrives blaring at the same time. So what I do is set the right side – the slide faders that look like EQs but they're not, they're just volume tone and gain – I set those to the Gibsons, and the other side for the Fenders. That's pretty much it!

"It sounds wonderful – it's a subtle difference, but there's some nights where, and it's room-specific, you just need a little more brightness on the Gibsons for those Gary Moore-ish moments. I'm not the kind of cat that kneels down and adjusts the fuckin' tone... that's for indie-rock guys! So this has been a really good transition – it really is a much more versatile pedal if you're dealing with multiple styles of guitars. And it looks cool, too!

"I think there will be 1,000 of them made world wide, and then we're shutting them down!"



TOMORROW

PEOPLE

Milan plays host to a celebration of forward-thinking guitar and bass gear from Yamaha and Line 6

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Back at the tail end of June we strapped ourselves into a seat on yet another winged bird of aluminium and flew south-east to Italy's fashion hub, Milan. The city isn't all about designer boutiques and chain-smoking, though – a 45-minute drive out of the centre saw us arrive at Yamaha's motor racing headquarters in Gerno di Lesmo, where we were treated to a Yamaha and Line 6 product expo entitled 'Tools For Tomorrow's Musician'.

The big reveal at the event was Yamaha's new-for-2017 BB Bass range, which celebrates 40 years of the iconic bolt-on design by reimagining it with a smaller, more ergonomic body and a series of innovative, well-spec'd models across the board from affordable workhorses such as the BB 234 (£332 street) to the top-of-the-line, Japanese-made Pro Series BBP34 (£1,559 street) and >

BBP35 (£1,606 street), which feature alder/maple/alder body construction treated with Yamaha's proprietary Initial Response Acceleration technology and a five-ply maple and mahogany laminate neck with a six-bolt mitre joint.

On hand to demonstrate the new BB Bass models were a cast of bass virtuosi, including Miki Santamaria and Chris Minh Doky, while the way in which Yamaha and Line 6's recent product releases can coexist in harmony in a bass or guitar rig was showcased by genre-splicing Australian metal band, Twelve Foot Ninja. The band's guitarist Stevic MacKay illustrated how his modernistic approach to the electric guitar is facilitated by the myriad tonal and tuning possibilities of a rig centred around his Line 6 Variax Shuriken Baritone Electric Guitar and the Helix floorboard.

Although the event coincided with one of the wettest days of the Milanese summer, spirits were far from damp as we moved on to the city's Alcatraz concert hall for an evening of live music from Yamaha and Line 6 artists including a hard-rocking set from The Answer featuring cameos from Billy Sheehan and Soren Anderson, and the undoubted highlight: a string of Joy Division and New Order classics performed by Peter Hook & The Light. The Manchester legend's new, low-slung BB Bass featured prominently on skyscraping renditions of the likes of *Atmosphere* and *Love Will Tear Us Apart*. As bass guitar demos go, we've witnessed much, much worse...

For more information on the new Yamaha BB Bass range visit uk.yamaha.com

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Strat Tone

The Ultimate Guide

From Hank and Buddy through to Jimi, Clapton, Gilmour, Knopfler, SRV and beyond, the Fender Stratocaster has been at the heart of popular music for more than six decades. Despite its familiarity, its charms are still the source of mystery and wonder to many guitarists today. Whether you're shopping for your first Strat or looking to breathe new life into a old favourite, when it comes to killer Strat tone, we have the answers. It's time to turn on, tune in and rock out...

Story **Huw Price**

When we think about improving our tone it's just too easy to focus on the micro and ignore the macro. Although it must be said, buying electronic components, lumps of metal and so forth is a lot less exciting than waiting six months for a set of boutique pickups recommended by some random forum dude to arrive from the frozen wastes of Alaska. Nevertheless, in this tone quest, addressing the system as a whole is more likely to produce the desired results than a potentially dispiriting and financially ruinous cycle of smaller upgrades.

This principle applies to all guitars, but none more so than the Stratocaster.

Over the next 12 pages, we're going to provide you with what amounts to a holistic approach to Stratocaster tone optimisation. The topic is approached from various angles in the order we believe they should be addressed. Beginning with string choice and setup, we will consider hardware and electronics before moving on to pickups. This is based on a firm belief that the starting point for tone is a Strat that is properly set up and sounds good acoustically.

Before we continue, it's worth noting that we're going to be assuming you own a traditional stock Stratocaster here, with the usual pickups, controls, hardware and the like. If your Strat has humbuckers, a locking vibrato or other major mods then obviously some of this won't be applicable – but equally a lot of it will.

Let's dive in...

VOLUME
TONE
TONE

STRING GAUGE

Selecting your strings is crucial, because a Stratocaster should be set up with the actual string gauge that you intend to use. The core diameter and tension of your strings determine how the Strat's spring claw must be set – which in turn carries over to saddle heights, intonation adjustment and truss rod tension.

A great setup means two things – the guitar will play well, and you'll actually be able to play the damn thing for more than five minutes! That may seem like a statement of the obvious but Stevie Ray Vaughan's reputed predilection for ultra-heavy strings has led plenty of us to ponder the optimum pain to tone ratio.

Fat strings can sound fantastic with vintage-style single coils because they solidify and fatten up the tone, and provide higher output levels without the dullness of overwound pickups. However if you're struggling to bend a full tone and your fretting hand cramps up after a few minutes, your guitar may indeed sound great, but you won't.

Remember that SRV detuned a half step, which would have made the 0.012-gauge sets he preferred when his fingers were sore feel more like 0.011s. Also consider the material, because pure nickel sounds warmer than nickel plated steel and round cores will sound more 'vintage' than hex cores. Base your string choice on what sounds good to you, the pitch you prefer to tune to and the gauge you can realistically manage. >

KILLER STRAT AMPS

Marshall Super Bass

Any list of great amps for Strats would be incomplete without a big Marshall head. The 100-watt Super Lead might be the obvious choice but the inherent brightness can render a Strat's bridge pickup a no-go zone. There were relatively few circuit differences between the two when they were first introduced, but the Super Lead evolved over the years while the Super Bass stayed the same. They work superbly with Strats because they overdrive easily and the absence of bright caps keeps things smooth – allowing you to dime the treble and presence controls without the ice pick top-end. A long time favourite of Gary Moore and John Frusciante.

ESSENTIAL STRAT EFFECTS

Fuzz

For wrenching more body, sustain and sheer aggression out of a Stratocaster, a fuzz box is a sure thing. However, the effect can vary so much depending on the circuit in question. Fuzz Face circuits with germanium transistors work for early Hendrix tones, but Floyd fans may prefer the later silicon transistor Fuzz Face that David Gilmour used on *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. Later, Gilmour began using various Electro-Harmonix Big Muff pedals for their smoother and more velvety sustain and it's a favourite of alt-rockers, too. Many Strat players use a cranked Fuzz Face with the guitar's volume rolled back to tame the sizzle – it's super touch-sensitive and more articulate that way.

© Getty Images

Among the signature instruments launched at Summer NAMM 2017 was the guitar that graces this month's cover: Fender's Jimi Hendrix Monterey Stratocaster (£809). To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the sacrificial burning of Jimi's Strat at the Monterey Pop Festival, Fender's limited-edition tribute model features an homage to the psychedelic artwork on the hand-painted original. Visit fender.com for more

CLASSIC TONES (AND HOW TO GET THEM)

Jimi Hendrix *Bold As Love*

Bold As Love features some stellar examples of Jimi's playing and tones, however we're going to focus on the psychedelic solo that finishes the track. It's hard to hear everything that's going on because of the heavy effects, but we think it's probably incorrect to say tape flanging was used on Jimi's solo. The swooshing and swelling of stereo image is confined to the drums and the cleaner rhythm guitar part. Jimi's guitar stays firmly locked on one side of the mix through most of this section, however there is a modulation effect on the guitar and we think it's almost certainly a Uni-Vibe. Throw in a germanium Fuzz Face and a Marshall, and go crazy.

Matching the radius of your saddles to your fingerboard can help prevent choke-out

SETTING UP

The alchemy of setting up a guitar is deserving of a publication all of its own, so we'll restrict ourselves to the aspects that have the most impact on tone – and that starts with the vibrato. It's up to you whether you prefer to block it off, have downward movement only, or float it for up and down pitch shifts, however what you choose does have some bearing on sonics.

Blocking off a trem by wedging a piece of wood between the block and the back of the spring cavity tends to thicken the midrange and soften the transients for a more compressed tone. Some claim it improves sustain – Clapton is a fan. In contrast, floating the trem tends to open up the sound and allow the treble harmonics to ring a bit clearer. You may also discern a bit more of the Strat's springy 'internal reverb' and you can enhance this effect by removing the spring cover.

For a Strat to sound its best, the strings must be able to ring cleanly and this is achieved through adjustments to the truss rod tension and saddle heights. Strings vibrate in an arc with minimum displacement near the nut and bridge. If the fingerboard is set too flat the strings tend to buzz against the frets and a very slight degree of upwards curve (aka neck relief) can prevent this.

Even if you aren't experiencing fret noise, you may notice that the tone becomes warmer and fuller as relief increases. However the guitar may feel harder to play, so try to find a compromise setting by trusting your ears and your fingers.

Similarly, you have to rely on your ears when you're adjusting the action. Set too low, the strings will choke out against the frets when you bend them, and this is most apparent on B and top E strings. If you want clean bends and maximum sustain you have to set the saddle heights so that the strings can be bent without choking out.

The fingerboard radius and, to a lesser extent, the condition of the frets determine how low the action can go. Since modern Fender Strats have 9.5-inch radius fingerboards and vintage spec is 7.25 inches, the unwound strings must be set higher for optimum Strat tone than they might be on guitars with a flatter fingerboard radius. If you're struggling with higher action, try lighter strings. >

KILLER STRAT AMPS

Dumble Steel String Singer

Few of us will ever get the chance to play one of these, and the 12 or so existing examples are destined to spend eternity circulating through the hands of wealthy collectors and celebrity players such as Joe Bonamassa, Eric Johnson and John Mayer. This is among the most fabled of amps because it's the one SRV used to record most of *Texas Flood* in Jackson Browne's studio. It's thought to have belonged to Browne's guitarist, David Lindley. Primarily designed for clean headroom, clarity and high volume, these amps compress and overdrive very nicely, too. Clones are available from Two-Rock, Ceriatone, Sebago and Amplified Nation.

ESSENTIAL STRAT EFFECTS

Overdrive/Boost

Most Strat pickups have relatively low output, so they may need a little help to achieve the required amount of overdrive. The Ibanez Tube Screamer circuit has long set the standard because it bolsters the midrange and rolls off the top end to keep treble sweet. Most modern overdrive pedals offer some variation on the Tube Screamer circuit, but also check out the Boss OD models and Yngwie Malmsteen's favourite DOD 250. Long before pedal overdrive, players used boost pedals such as the Dallas Rangemaster and the Hornby Skewes to force amps into overdrive. Modern boosts with Klon type circuits offer higher fidelity, improved playing dynamics and subtle shades of drive.

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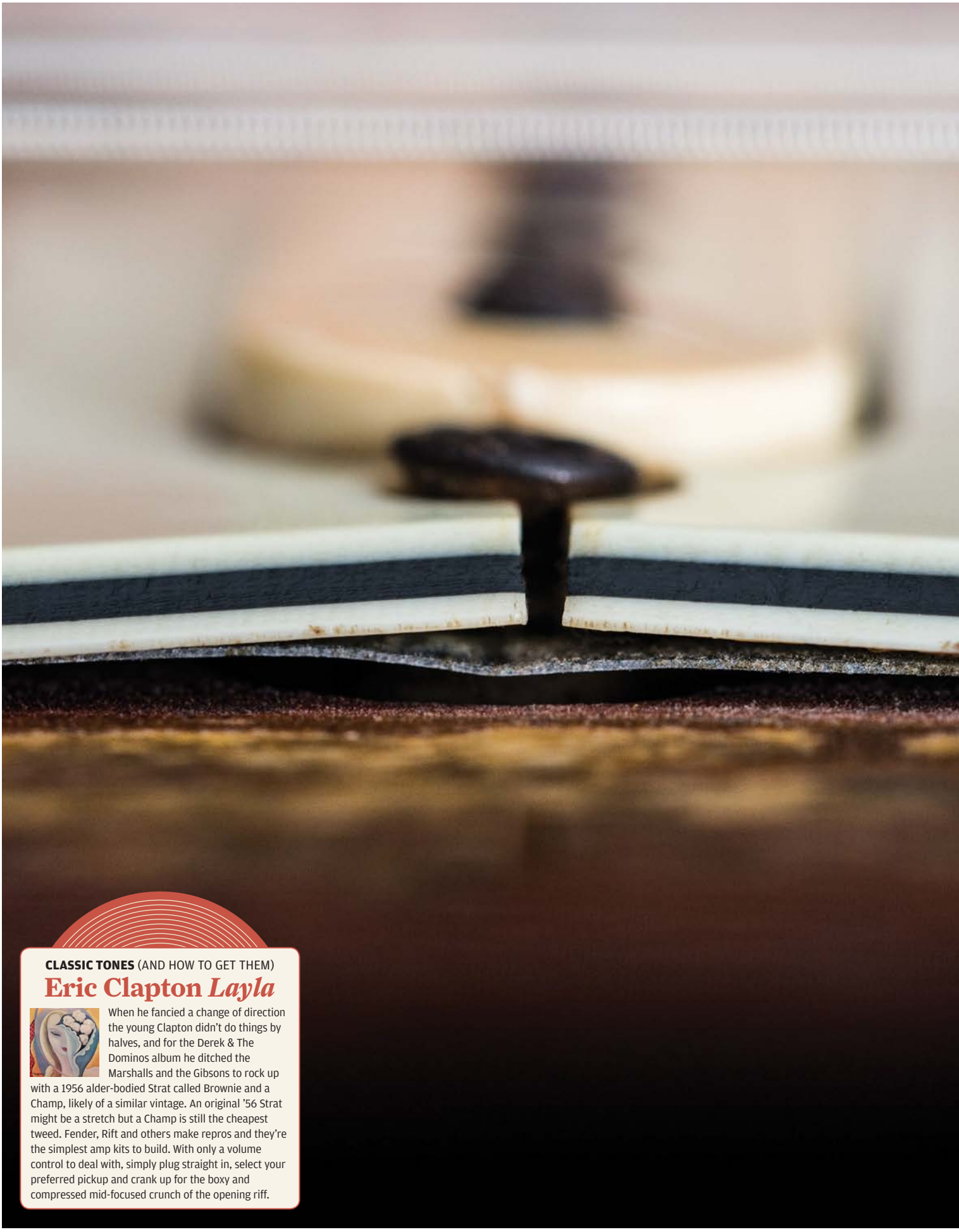
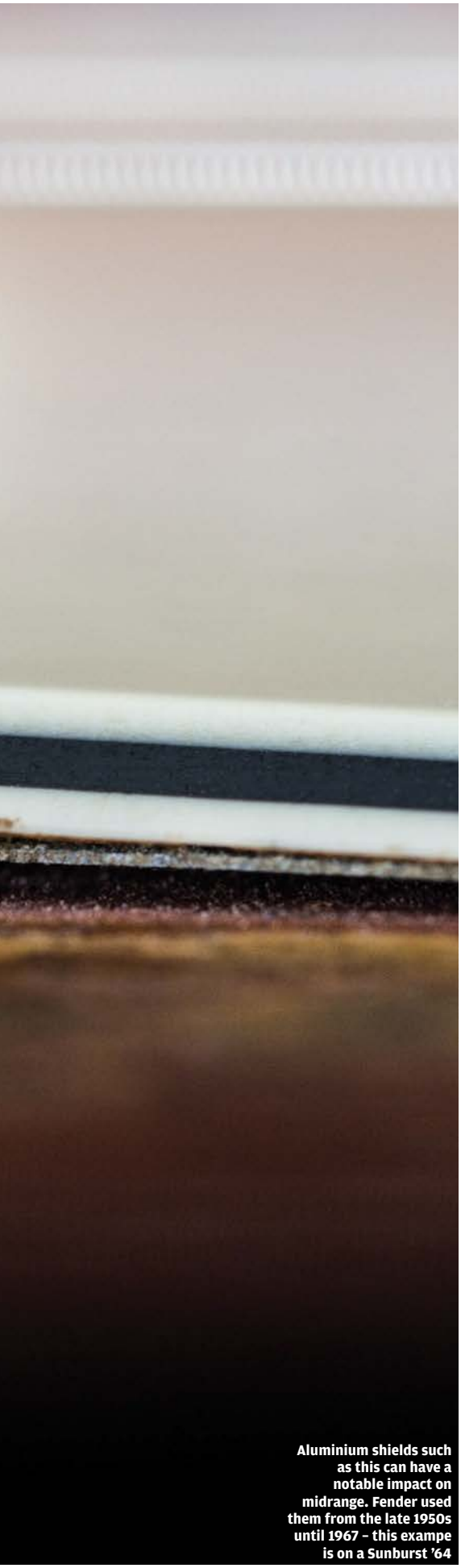


CLASSIC TONES (AND HOW TO GET THEM)

Eric Clapton *Layla*

When he fancied a change of direction the young Clapton didn't do things by halves, and for the Derek & The Dominos album he ditched the Marshalls and the Gibsons to rock up with a 1956 alder-bodied Strat called Brownie and a Champ, likely of a similar vintage. An original '56 Strat might be a stretch but a Champ is still the cheapest tweed. Fender, Rift and others make repros and they're the simplest amp kits to build. With only a volume control to deal with, simply plug straight in, select your preferred pickup and crank up for the boxy and compressed mid-focused crunch of the opening riff.



Aluminium shields such as this can have a notable impact on midrange. Fender used them from the late 1950s until 1967 – this exampe is on a Sunburst '64

WIRING

With three pickups, a five-way switch, three control potentiometers and an abundance of space under the pickguard to play with, it's hardly surprising that there are more wiring mods for Strats than any other type of guitar. Here, were looking at what you can do with a Strat with stock features.

When we consider Strat electronics, one aspect is often overlooked and it plays a subtle yet important function in the vintage tone equation – from the late 1950s until 1967 Fender used a 14-gauge aluminium shield under the pickguard.

Various metals can be used for shielding however the effectiveness of a single layer under a pickguard is questionable. More interesting is the effect aluminium has on Strat tone due to 'paramagnetism'. Fitting an aluminium shield has a clearly audible effect, with rounder mids and a vocal 'ooh' tone for single notes. You can buy a shield for around £10 and they're easy to fit – it doesn't even require any soldering.

The value of the tone capacitor is another often overlooked feature. Contrary to popular belief, tone controls continue bleeding treble even when they're supposedly turned off. If you need convincing, consider how the bridge pickup of vintage-style Strat sets usually sounds disproportionately bright compared to the middle and neck.

It's because stock Strat wiring leaves the bridge pickup unconnected to a tone control. If you ever feel the need to even things up, simply install a jumper wire to allow the bridge and middle pickups to share the same tone control. Since tone controls are always in-circuit, it follows that the tone capacitor's value must influence a Strat's treble characteristics. In 1964, the Strat's 10th anniversary coincided with a change in cap value from 0.1uF to 0.047uF.

In guitar circuits, there's treble roll-off and a resonance peak at the roll-off frequency. All things being equal, a Strat will sound brighter with a 0.047uF tone cap than it will with a 0.1uF. This is due to the roll-off frequency and resonance peak occurring higher in the audio spectrum.

Until now, we've been considering ways to optimise your guitar, but this is where we move onto modification. So long as you are not buying some fancy relic'd replicas, tone capacitors are cheap and easy to find. You could try paper/oil, ceramic or modern film capacitors to discover which you prefer, and while you may discern some subtle difference in tone and response between the various types, it's the value that's paramount.

If your Strat sounds too bright, try fitting a 0.1uF cap. If you want to brighten things up, go for 0.047uF. If you're using hot wound pickups and find them too dark, you could even go to a 0.022uF or 0.033uF. Potentiometer values have a big influence on tone, too, because they effect the resonance peak at the cutoff frequency. Large value control potentiometers make guitars sound brighter by accentuating the resonance peak.

Fender has always used 250k pots in Stratocasters, except for a brief period in 1954 when the very earliest Stratocasters had 100k pots. We've tried these in a 1954 replica and there is a very noticeable sweetening of the treble and a smoother quality to the tone overall. However, you do lose some glassy sheen and shimmer.

You can darken, brighten, smooth out or add edge to your tone simply by altering component values or fitting a shield. What's more, you can do all three for £15 or so, which may be less than a tenth of the cost of that mojo-infused, hand-wound pickup set you've been lusting after... >

KILLER STRAT AMPS

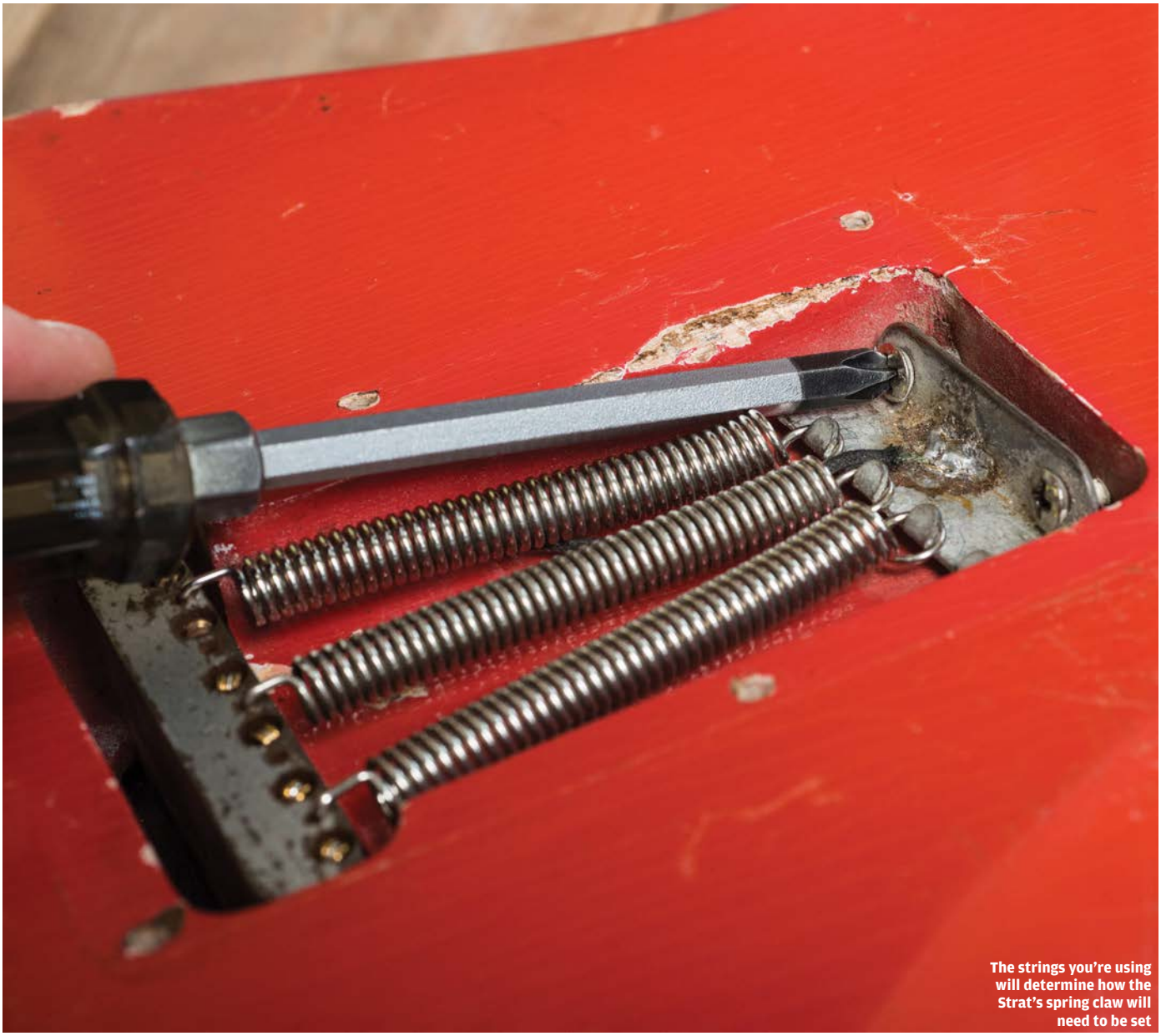
Vox AC30

Maybe it's the amp's thick and chewy midrange, the natural compression of cathode-biased EL84s or the joyous chime of the Celestion Blue alnico speakers, but the combination of a Vox AC30 and a Stratocaster has been a genre-hopping dream team for countless guitarists over the years. Hank Marvin must have been the first with his echo-drenched melodies and The Edge put his own spin on things 20 years later. In between there was Rory Gallagher and Ritchie Blackmore, who recorded with this setup throughout the Deep Purple and Rainbow years.

ESSENTIAL STRAT EFFECTS

Delay

Maybe it's the Strat's clear and defined tonal character that makes it the most common choice for echo obsessives. Hank Marvin set things off with his Meazzi Echomatic and if you couldn't afford one of those a WEM Copycat would have to do. The Binson Echorec could get seriously psychedelic in the hands of David Gilmour. He also pioneered the use of complex delays for building atmospheric rhythmic patterns. The Edge picked up the baton and developed the theme. Although he started off with Memory Mans, the advent of digital delays such as the Korg SDD-3000 and TC 2290 – often used simultaneously – allowed precise syncing of delay times with tempos.



The strings you're using will determine how the Strat's spring claw will need to be set

CLASSIC TONES (AND HOW TO GET THEM)

The Shadows *Apache*

As well as being a huge hit and a major influence on most of the great British players of the 1960s, *Apache* is surely one of the most sampled guitar tracks of all time, and one of the greatest sounding. It was recorded in 1960 and Hank Marvin would have played his late-50s Strat through a Vox amplifier – either an AC15 or one of his newer AC30s. With that combination it's hard to go wrong, but the real magic (besides Hank's special touch) comes from the effects. Hank used a Meazzi Echomatic multi-tap echo unit gifted to him by Joe Brown and the engineers added reverb using one of Abbey Road's purpose-built reverb chambers.

HARDWARE

With Strat hardware there are three areas of interest – the vibrato block, saddles and springs. It's odd how some guitars seem to sound best with lightweight aluminium hardware while others benefit from heavier metals. Fenders in general, and Strats in particular, tend to fall into the latter category.

They no doubt have their adherents, but the cheap alloy units that replaced the bent steel saddles of the pre-CBS era are considered to be the worst for tone. Steel rings clearer and brighter and stainless steel sounds brighter still. Slippery Graph Tech saddles are popular with heavy whammy bar users, but can sound dark and lack bite. Brass saddles were a popular mod in the 70s and 80s and are claimed to improve sustain and thicken up tone.

Strat bridges with detachable blocks can also be modded. Heavy steel blocks were used in pre-CBS Strats and you can buy UK made replacements from Kevin Hurley or Wudtone for a variety of bridge types and screw spacings. You can expect more open treble, improved definition and longer sustain than with cheap alloy blocks.

Also consider Killer Guitar Components' brass blocks and brass spring claws if you want a beefier tone with smoother transient attack. While you are changing blocks – or merely changing strings – try Eric Johnson's trick of removing the paint from the top of the block for direct metal-to-metal contact. He also removes lacquer from the neck pocket and the area beneath the bridge.

Alternatively, check out Wudtone's 'Whacker Plate' – a 0.5mm sliver of stainless steel that sits between the body and bridge plate to enhance bridge-to-body contact (see our review of various Wudtone Strat upgrades on p88). It improves definition and clarity while providing a smoother vibrato feel. >

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A five-way switch makes it easier to nail the *Sultans Of Swing* tone – you'll also have to lose that pick

© Getty Images

CLASSIC TONES (AND HOW TO GET THEM)

Mark Knopfler *Sultans Of Swing*

Nowadays he's seldom seen with them, but the man who finally killed the three-way switch will forever be associated with a red, maple 'board 1961 Stratocaster. Knopfler's parts were probably recorded through the bright channel of a brown tolex Fender Vibrolux amp that may have been fitted with a 12-inch Fane speaker. You can hear compression, but it's more likely a studio unit rather than the oft-suggested Dan Armstrong Orange Squeezer. The intermittent chorus effects would have been done with a Roland Jazz Chorus amp or with a Roland Dimension D processor. Crank to the edge of overdrive and select an in-between pickup setting.

Most great-sounding old Strat pickups have a degree of microphony – it adds extra upper-harmonic sheen

PICKUPS

Pickup swapping is probably the most popular Strat modification and deservedly so because it has the biggest tonal impact of all. However it can be the most expensive, and often the cause of greatest frustration.

If you take one lesson from this feature, it should be that pickup upgrades provide the best bang for buck when you're optimising a guitar that already plays well and sounds good acoustically. In other words, top quality pickups should be regarded as a finishing touch rather than a miracle cure.

For classic Strat tone, alnico magnets are essential. Some like bright yet softer-sounding alnico III slugs, but post-1955 Fender used alnico V slugs with bevelled edges. The bevels are also important for vintage tone. Until 1973 the slugs were staggered, however, Monty's and Lollar have both told us that flat slugs provide the most even string-to-string response.

Scatter winding is a staple of most boutique pickups and heavy formvar wire is recommended for pre-CBS tone. Hendrix and Gilmour fans may wish to experiment with plain enamel wire. Hand-winding ensures the wire layers are less tightly packed – lowering the capacitance of the pickup and raising the resonant peak to achieve a clearer and brighter tone.

One sonic attribute that we have found is common to all great-sounding vintage Strat pickups is some degree of microphony. Whether this is attributable to partial wax potting or a gradual loosening of the coils is debatable, but the upshot is an extra level of upper-harmonic sheen and vibrant touch dynamics that make a guitar feel alive. Relatively few of the boutique winders are able to replicate this 100 per cent convincingly, but House Of Tone certainly can. >

ESSENTIAL STRAT EFFECTS

Reverb

Reverb can seriously muddy up some guitars, but it tends to work like a charm with Strats. In fact a Strat with a clean amp and a ton of reverb is just about all you need to play surf guitar. Lots of the old blues players liked to max out the reverb on their Fender amps, too. Just a hint can add a 3D quality to picked arpeggios. Increase reverb intensity and the decay time and you can create washes and keyboard-like pads. It's also fun to ride the volume control to create swells into a heavy reverb effect. James Wilsey is the king of Strat atmospherics – if in doubt, check out *Wicked Game* for its heart-melting combination of Strat and Deluxe Reverb with a pre-delayed stereo chorus.

KILLER STRAT AMPS

Fender Tweed Deluxe

Just as the Stratocaster evolved through the 1950s, so did Fender's revered tweed Deluxe models. From A to E they're all fantastic in their own way but it's interesting to note how the Deluxe models and Strats evolved in opposite directions – as the amplifiers became brighter and thinner, the Stratocasters got warmer and fatter. Each of these amp models can generate wiry and quacky Strat tones, sweetly saturated shimmer and full on crunchy distortion that borders on metal and they interact superbly with a Strat's onboard controls. Plug a good Strat into a tweed Deluxe and you might suddenly find that you don't need stompboxes at all...

CLASSIC TONES (AND HOW TO GET THEM)

David Gilmour

Shine On You Crazy Diamond

This track is like a taster menu of Gilmour's Strat tones. His amps were reputedly a Fender Dual Showman and a Hiwatt DR103 and he played his black Strat throughout. The dark lead lines in the intro presage his *Another Brick In The Wall Pt 2* solo (though that was a P90 Goldtop) with copious compression and a DI neck pickup tone. The main figure sounds like the bridge pickup played through a Leslie rotating speaker and it's mic'd in stereo. The first solo has a compressed but clean tone, but Gilmour lifts the dynamic with extra bite and a hint of crunch from a Colorsound Power Boost on the turnaround, later adding an MXR Phase 90 – and all within the first eight minutes.

Finding the optimal pickup height and angle will have a transformative effect on your guitar's sound

PICKUP HEIGHT

The height of the pickups relative to the strings is crucial to dialling in your tone. Adjusting them is the only way to explore the full tonal potential of your pickups and after tweaking, your pickups may actually sound better than ever. Experimenting costs nothing and all you need is a screwdriver.

As long as the polepieces aren't touching the strings or the pickups aren't falling off the adjustment screws, any height is fair game and your ears will know when something's wrong. One hazard of setting the pickups too high is excessive magnetic pull on the strings. Magnetism inhibits string vibration, which reduces sustain and in extreme cases causes pitch anomalies. You are most likely to hear these as an atonal honk when playing the low E and A strings above the 12th fret.

Setting a pickup high emphasises treble and increases output level. But if you go too far you lose sustain and the tone can become excessively shrill. Lowering will tame the aggression and provide a smoother, sweeter and clearer tone. Go too low and reduced sensitivity and low output may become issues.

As with all things guitar, compromise is key. Optimising your pickup height settings may not be the magic bullet, however it's absolutely essential to get all three balanced.

Set your amp at a medium volume with a neutral frequency response and switch to the bridge pickup. As you raise the height, listen to the way the sound changes. For now keep the pickup flat rather than tilted and listen for tonal character and output level.

Once you're happy, pick through the notes of an open E chord and fine-tune the pickup height so the low E and A strings are equal in volume level to the B and high E. You can try playing chords higher up the neck, too.

If the bass strings dominate, lower that side. If the treble strings are too bright, then lower that side. A little goes a long way and remember this is about achieving balance rather than adjusting bass and treble. That's what your amp's tone controls are for.

With your bridge pickup adjustment complete, switch to the neck. Again the goal is to get a balanced tone from the pickup but we're also trying to match its output level with the bridge pickup. Switch back and forth between the bridge and neck for reference. Using vintage style sets, where all three have the same DC resistance, the neck pickup will end up lower than the bridge.

Use the same procedure for the middle pickup and compare it with the neck and the bridge. Some Strat players rarely use the middle pickup, unless it's in the in-between settings and you can actually fine-tune the phasiness if you work quickly.

Try holding a chord with one of the in-between settings selected. You should be able to hear the phasiness and quackiness change as the height changes.

Enjoy it, let your ears guide you and don't forget to check out the tonal differences between spacer springs and neoprene tubing. The springs may make your tone brighter and more microphonic – seriously!

KILLER STRAT AMPS

Fender Deluxe Reverb

Of all the classic Fender amps, the 22-watt Deluxe Reverb has just the right levels of volume, clean headroom and overdrive onset to be usable in most modern playing situations. Another great thing about these amps is that they carry two of the effects that Strats love best onboard – spring reverb and tremolo. The Silverface and Blackface models are almost identical electronically, so you can easily convert one to the other. This great all-round amp can do surf, blues, country, funk and classic rock. You can get beautiful mid-scooped early John Mayer tones, while pumping the midrange and the input with a Tube Screamer gets you close enough to SRV, too.

ESSENTIAL STRAT EFFECTS

Vibe

Rotating Leslie speakers were designed for use with Hammond organs, but mid-60s guitarists fell in love with the phasey swoosh and playing guitar through them became a popular studio trick. Unfortunately the size and weight of a Leslie cabinet is closer to that of a small outbuilding than the average stompbox. Along came the Shin-ei Uni-Vibe and guitarists had a portable phase/vibrato/chorus device for Doppler fun in a gig-friendly format. Most synonymous with Hendrix, the Uni-Vibe is a key component in Robin Trower's tone and David Gilmour has also used them extensively. Even smaller versions are now available from Dunlop, Fulltone, Sweet Sound and TC Electronic.

>

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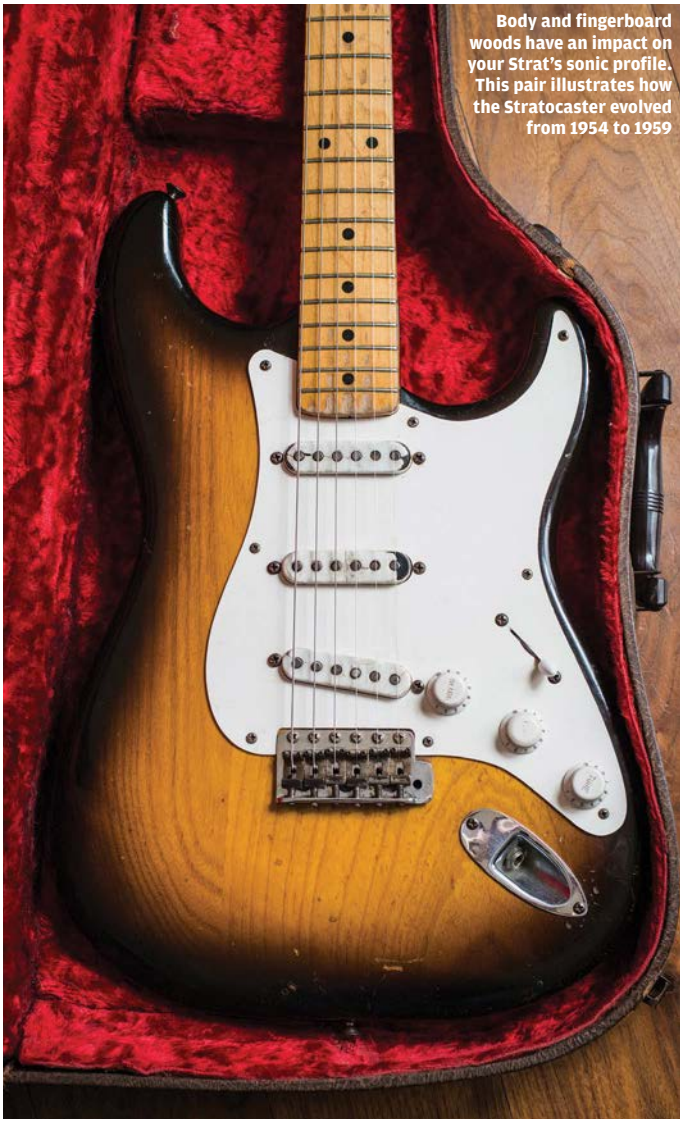
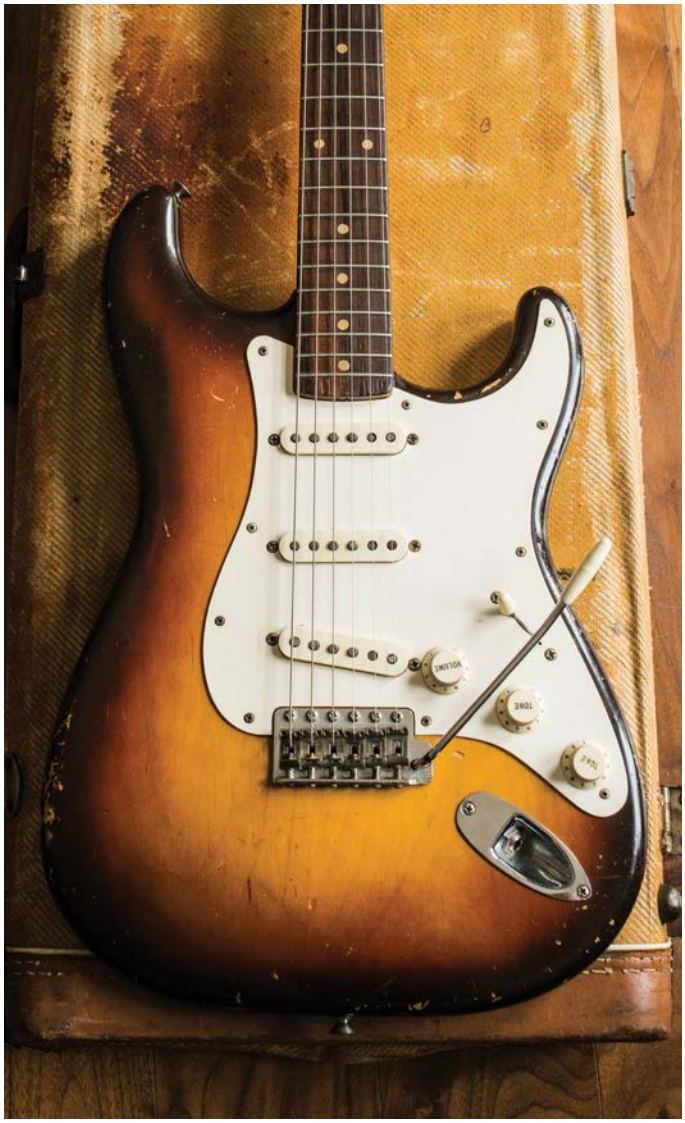


Body and fingerboard woods have an impact on your Strat's sonic profile. This pair illustrates how the Stratocaster evolved from 1954 to 1959



WOOD & FINISH

Hitherto we've confined our discussion to things you can do to your current Stratocaster, however there are some aspects you might want to consider when buying a Strat. An understanding of tonewoods and neck dimensions will help you make informed choices.

You may see basswood or other timbers on budget instruments but we're talking tone. The very best Strats then and now have alder or ash bodies – although rare mahogany bodied Strats have been reported from the pre-CBS era.

Bodies with a lighter weight tend to resonate more freely. Ash is associated with a bright and clear tone with fast attack and deep lows. Alder tends to sound fatter in the mids and maybe a tad warmer but each is a fine tonewood in its own right.

Stratocaster necks have almost always been maple but they're often designated as 'maple necks' or 'rosewood necks' depending on the fingerboard. The earliest were one-piece maple, before Fender the introduced slab rosewood fingerboard that evolved into the veneer rosewood board – as seen on SRV's Number One. Later 'maple necks' from the Hendrix era had glued on maple boards.

Maple necks are generally associated with bright tone. But since they were more of a 50s feature, when bright ash bodies combined with bright under-wound pickups, we suspect the maple board is the least of it. Having swapped rosewood and maple necks on an alder-bodied Strat, we feel the board material has more impact on feel than tone.

However, neck size does seem to be a factor and we have found that deep and substantial necks impart a snappier and brighter tone with a touch more sustain. Thinner necks sound great too, but we associate them with slightly warmer and darker tone. On balance we think the body wood and its weight have more overall influence and you're better off just picking a neck that feels good to play.

Nitrocellulose looks gorgeous, ages gracefully and allows guitars to resonate – but it's not the only finish that does so. Run the rule over top acoustic builders such as Collings, Taylor and Bourgeois and you'll find that a variety of modern finishes are considered to be compatible with outstanding tone. We've played great sounding Strats with poly finishes, and poor ones, too. The most important thing is that the finish should be thinly applied, irrespective of the material.

CLASSIC TONES (AND HOW TO GET THEM)

Stevie Ray Vaughan *Lenny*

For the ultimate in pure, shimmering Stratocaster tones in the hand of a master player, it's hard to think of a finer example than this cut from SRV's debut album. Recorded with the guitar he called 'Lenny' – comprising a '65 alder body and a replacement maple neck – the El Mocambo video clearly shows flat slugs, so the pickups were almost certainly post-1973 Fenders. You can get close to this tone with any vintage-style Blackface Fender amp but the fat mids suggest the 15-inch speaker of a Vibroverb, or maybe a Dumble. Lenny's vibrato was free floating and the lush reverb is a studio effect – probably coming from an EMT plate or an AKG spring.

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War Correspondent

Three years after breaking into the indie mainstream with third album, Lost In The Dream, spacey Philadelphian sextet **The War On Drugs** return with their best record yet – **A Deeper Understanding**. Ahead of its release, we sat down with creative fulcrum Adam Granduciel to talk phasers, Falcons, and the joy of 1980s multi-effects...

Story **Josh Gardner** Photography **Shawn Brackbill**

The first time that Adam Granduciel – frontman, guitarist and heartbeat of The War On Drugs – picked up an electric guitar, he knew things would never be the same again – "It was like *that* moment," the 37-year-old Bostonian explains as he reclines on a sofa in the Warner Music offices in London. "It was seventh grade, I'd got super in to music six months before, so I was obsessed. I went over to my friend Jeff's house – he played drums because his dad played guitar. In retrospect, he obviously had his son learn drums so he had someone to jam with! He had what would now be considered a man cave in the basement with a pool table, his son's drum kit, a four-track... and he had a red Washburn, a Peavey amp and an ART digital effects system."

The 12-year-old Granduciel had caught the grunge bug when he first heard Nirvana's *In Utero*, but nothing could prepare him for the experience of picking up that red Washburn...

"I plugged in the guitar – and it was like, unlike anything I'd ever..." Adam trails off, struggling to find the words. "I could feel the floor shake. It was just the standard tone, but in 1992 that was like, distortion with chorus and phaser on it [chuckles] – if you wanted a 'normal' sound on a guitar, that's where you would start! Every multi-effects unit, that was preset 001 – like, an insane amount of chorus! But the greatest feeling I'd ever experienced was playing that guitar, and I just knew from that moment that was what I wanted to do. I don't think >

my parents bought me a guitar for maybe a year, but I would just be like, 'I can't wait until I can go and see Jeff and play that guitar again'. The next time I went over I learned a chord, E minor, and then A... and I made 20 songs out of those two chords!"

Modulation Station

Listening to The War On Drugs' music, it's clear that while Granduciel's grasp of the electric guitar has come a very long way from two-chord endeavours, the none-more-80s sound of that original multi-effects preset left its mark. Listen to 2014's breakthrough record, *Lost In The Dream*, or their brand new major label debut, *A Deeper Understanding*, and you'll hear spades of chiming chorus, pulsating phasers, soaring delays and a veritable cathedral of reverb over every song.

These effects may have earned a bad name for themselves in the 1980s, but *A Deeper Understanding* reaffirms how, in the right hands, they can create dazzling ethereal soundscapes that form the multi-layered bedrock upon which The War On Drugs' soaring anthemic rock songs are built.

It's no surprise that Adam has ended up approaching these tools with a more grounded, more visceral take when you consider his guitar influences. Nirvana, Soundgarden and Smashing Pumpkins are perhaps to be expected, but king among his inspirations is arch-retronaut, Neil Young.

"Around that time he was doing all that stuff with Pearl Jam, so it was like 'Oh yeah this Neil Young guy...'" he explains. "Because I had *Harvest* and *Harvest Moon*, but I didn't know he was also a guitar guy – so then I got into him and went down that road."

Since the departure of his friend Kurt Vile in 2008, The War On Drugs has very much been Granduciel's project, with a revolving cast of musicians coming in to work with him at his Philadelphia base. However, the success of *Lost In A Dream* led to a long world tour that would throw Adam and the core band into a more traditional dynamic.

> "When you're on tour, it's the only time that you get to have band practice every day for two hours. There's nowhere anyone needs to be!"

"I would be nowhere without the guys I play in the band with, and they know that," he explains. "We also really respect that this is what has worked, yknow? I have a certain way of working. But as you do more and more touring, everyone becomes way more involved in making it their own thing."

The tour also gave Adam and the rest of the band a chance to develop songs together at sound-checks, allowing them to have more direct input on the way songs developed. "It's the only time that you get to have band practice every day for two hours. There's nowhere anyone needs to be!" Adam chuckles. "We're a thousand miles from home – no-one's got to run out. So it's really the best time to write and get ideas going."

Going It Alone

It turned out that the prep was useful – after the band returned from tour, Adam opted to move out to Los Angeles to work on the album, leaving him several thousand miles from his band – and everyone in his life.

"I was a little bit more physically isolated, rather than just emotionally." he reflects. "I couldn't call up my buddies and go have a beer, or I couldn't go hang out on the weekends or involve myself in their lives in the way that I want to. And then musically, I couldn't have them over to the studio that night – we had to find a time that worked and then I had to fly everyone out, and get them an Airbnb. And then it was like, super focussed, seven days of music. It wasn't a lot of, 'Let's go hang out!' Because I knew I only had 'em for a week and I wanted to squeeze everything into that week – rehearsal, writing, friendship, barbecues... so we did it all at the studio – we barbecued at the studio!"

With such a limited time-frame, the soundcheck jams and some abortive

recording in studios on the East Coast paid dividends when they went in to the studio in LA with producer Shawn Everrett.

"People were more familiar with the songs by the time we started recording them, because we'd demo'd a bunch of stuff, and stuff had been played or conceived on the road – or I had written a song and we played it at sound-checks," Adam explains. "And we'd tried to record a bunch of different times and nothing had really happened, y'know? So people were like, 'Oh we've recorded this – what isn't working? Why doesn't Adam like it? What can I do different on this session?'. It was pretty collaborative – and some of it was done the old way of piecemeal, or me taking bits and bobs from people – but it was more collaborative on the whole."

Delving Deeper

Listening to the interesting and esoteric nature of Adam's guitar parts, it's perhaps understandable that when it comes to writing, guitar isn't always his first port of call.

"Guitar is tough because you really have to imagine it," he observes. "A guy in a hotel room with an acoustic guitar and some feelings... you're like, 'Yeah, I've heard this before!' But flash forward a year and a half to the recorded version of that and it's, 'Oh I *haven't* heard this before.' But you have to go on something other than the basic chords and structure [to get that far] – you have to remember songs and think, 'There's something about this I like, I should come back to it with the band, or on an organ'. I like writing on piano because it's immediately sombre – my piano ability is pretty limited, but I like to think that I can develop a bit of a style within the chords that I know how to play."

Given the dense, multi-layered nature of the sound, however, when the time comes to put these parts together, >

Above **Adam does write on acoustic, but often finds it easier to be creative on other instruments**

Opposite **The War On Drugs (l-r) Anthony LaMarca, David Hartley, Robbie Bennett, Jon Natchez, Charlie Hall and Adam Granduciel**

Adam did a lot of the writing for the album on his own out in California

restraint is the order of the day – and it's not always the easiest thing to do.

"That's the thing – aways leaving some space," Adam acknowledges. "But the problem is that I get so in to recording that I spend six, seven, eight months on the same song. And I have all these different melodies going on in the song, and you want to highlight each of them, so it's trying to sculpt this thing where, if you put everything in, it would just be a wash, so you're trying to paint this picture, but keep all your favourite elements in."

Spending eight months on a song might seem excessive, but Adam's self-reflective style allows him to hone in on exactly what a guitar part needs to be.

"A lot of it comes from demoing, and recording, and then listening to the demo over and over," he notes. "It's having time to listen to the demo and be like, 'Oh that solo is actually almost there'. I feel like this record has more 'composed' guitar parts – solos that are actually 'this note, then this note...' – it's more of a phrase than a bunch of wanking. It's fun to have wanking and noodling... and then it's also cool to make a progression to a record where we're like, 'In this section, it's always going to be this'."

Eclectic Guitar

As suits his eclectic guitar style, the guitars that Adam took into the studio are an equally diverse mix. "I used my Les Paul, which is a '72 Deluxe. I've got a 1980s Japanese Squier Strat that I used a lot on the record – it's just easy to play, light," he explains. "I also used my Gretsch White Falcon a lot. Towards the end of this record I bought this '66 SG – I was sat playing it in the store and it was so sweet, I couldn't not. I went back the next day – it was a refin so it was a little cheaper – and I bought that and then peppered that on a bunch of songs. I and have one of the new

Fender Jazzmasters, the '65 reissue. I really like that guitar.

"I also have a vintage non-reverse Firebird – I guess it was maybe a '65 but it was refin'd and it had P-90s put in it – the only original thing about it is the body and the neck. But that's a tough guitar – a tough one to put down and come back to. You really have to play it all the time, or just not play it at all. I don't know what it is! I've also picked up other Firebirds that don't feel like that one – it's an interesting instrument! The first time I played it I was in love with it – it was the first nice guitar I ever bought."

> "My Firebird is a tough guitar – a tough one to put down and come back to. You really have to play it all the time, or just not play it at all"

We notice that his tastes tend to lean towards vintage Gibsons and new Fender and Gretsch guitars, and his reasoning for that is typically pragmatic.

"Well, I buy the vintage Gibsons and they give me the new Fenders!" he laughs. "But it's cool, it's awesome. Fender have been awesome – they gave me that Gretsch, and the Jazzmaster, and I use the shit out of them. I want to buy a vintage Jazzmaster, but I'm also like, the way that the new one is, is like it's its own kind of sound. In the middle position – that Jazzmaster, with a chorus pedal – it's like the brightest, most crystalline thing. I'll put it this way, I wouldn't play a 1961 Jazzmaster the way I treat this one. Because if it breaks, I don't really care... well I do care, but it's fixable. I really lay into it, and it sounds different to a vintage one, and that's what's kinda cool about it."

Effects Appeal

When it comes to the all-important effects side of things, Adam leans on trusted boxes that he knows he can use and abuse in just the right way to create the musical, non-cliched sounds he's searching for.

"I think just trying to keep it simple and not over-thinking it," he affirms. "I really have one pedal for my chorus, which is my Memory Man on chorus mode – I've never been a Deluxe Memory Man kinda guy, I'm more about the Stereo Memory Man. I don't want to AB a bunch of chorus pedals, y'know? I just know that's the one that I really like. Phasers can be a slippery slope, but I have a couple of old ones that are cool – I had an old MuTron that doesn't work any more, but the guy from MuTron just sent me one of his new phasers, and they're actually really awesome. You can go between four-stage and six-stage, so you can almost get a Leslie effect. I love researching gear, but I don't want to use everything – I like to use the things where I know how they're going to respond. Like for example, when I hit the gain pedal, it's going to mess with the chorus pedal. I love Strymon, but sometimes if you just have only new things that aren't made to get glitchy... when you have old things going into new things, shit can get fucked up in a cool way."

In a live environment, however, the textures he needs to conjure give him a bit of a headache – after all, who doesn't want more pedals?

"It's a source of great stress to me!" he exclaims. "This last week my tech, my friend Dominic in New York, I said to him, 'I have to go to Europe for two weeks, can you bring my pedalboard to Bob [Bradshaw], who's the guy who designs the switching system, because he needs to give it a tune up before the tour' – and I put a box together with Dom of 10 new pedals that I want to swap out. But then last week we played a show and were rehearsing, and I got used to the board again the way I had it. So I really want to swap out these

Playing with Neil Young helped Adam realise that his White Falcon needed a Bigsby

THE BIGSBY IDEA

Adam on how Neil Young helped him truly fall in love with his White Falcon

"The White Falcon they gave to me at the start of the last tour, and it didn't have a Bigsby on it. And I used it, I liked it, and whenever I brought it out, people would be like, 'I love when you played the big white guitar!' But I only used it for very basic songs. But then we played this benefit with Neil Young when I was writing the new record, and the night before we got to watch the dress rehearsal, and he's playing his White Falcon with the Bigsby, and I'm like, 'Why don't I have a fuckin' Bigsby?! I've played this thing for two years – why have I never put a Bigsby on it?! Idiot!'

So then I wrote my guy at Fender and said, 'Can you guys put a Bigsby on?' He said, '100 per cent'. And then I picked it up a week later, which was the first day of recording. So we did *Thinking Of A Place* that night, and I went pretty heavy on the Bigsby – I was really going for it! But having that added expression on that guitar just made it seem obvious. So it was cool how a guitar can influence the sound in such an intense way, adding that Bigsby... I don't know if that song would have been the same if I hadn't put one on that guitar."

pedals, but it sounded sweet last week, and I don't want to fuck around with it! So I have this spreadsheet going on that's like 'The New Order'. [laughs]"

"The main thing right now is that I really have just one delay, which is my HardWire delay – I love those. I just want that very easy digital delay – I don't like timed tap tempos – I just want something to take the edge off it a little bit. I also use the HardWire reverb, just for reverse reverb. They're really strong. I have my Memory Man as a chorus, I have a stereo Uni-Vibe thing, and then the main thing is just figuring out my gain staging, because I always want to go one louder – so now I have like four pedals that get me louder.

"My switching system is such that I hit a button and it brings that pedal into the loop, but what I found out the other day, which I'd never really realised, is that I can have more than one pedal in one loop – so I can have three tremolo pedals as options, but then I just have to manually turn them on instead of having them all on. So, once I realised that, it was like, 'Oh...' So now I'm going to have to send it all to Bob – the master! But it's super fun – I just go for what works and what's reliable. The vintage stuff is cool, but sometimes in a live context and a touring context – either due to powering or durability, they can be problematic."

"In the studio, when I don't have to use my board, I can plug the guitar into the fuzz and right into the console, which is like my favourite thing – but you don't do that live! Then I have my tape echo, too. But for the live 'board it's a cool mix of utilitarian and some esoteric stuff. I have a LoveTone Doppleganger on there now – I'm not sure if I need it, but it's awesome for one thing, so I'm like, 'fuck it!' – even though it takes up half the board. The Strymon stuff is cool – it's really useful. The Flint is probably my favourite of their pedals, because I used it on so many of the keyboards on the record – it has that tremolo that you can work with your hands. I have it on my board with just a little bit of reverb, and then if I want tremolo I can hit the tremolo side, and I've got that going. I love those new Moog pedals, the smaller ones – the Tremolo is really awesome. I love tremolos, that's another one. I just got that [Fulltone] OCD overdrive, which is *killer* – it's not fuzz, but it has bite, like one level of crunch for a solo. It's really sweet."

"In the studio, I can plug the guitar into the fuzz and right into the console, which is like my favourite thing – but you don't do that live!"

Leading Questions

Throughout *A Deeper Understanding*, Adam peppers the tracks with soaring, classic-rock solos, and as we round up our chat, we ask him if he's comfortable with the 'lead guitar player' label?

"As long as I feel like I'm getting better," he affirms. "On the last record I got to a point where you're just on muscle memory, and you don't really feel like you're breaking any new ground. So when people throw words around like that it makes me uncomfortable! It's awesome, but you're thinking, 'I'm actually just digging through the same crate – I'm not finding that new ground!' But guitar is my life, y'know?"

The War On Drugs' new album, ***A Deeper Understanding****, is out now on Atlantic.*

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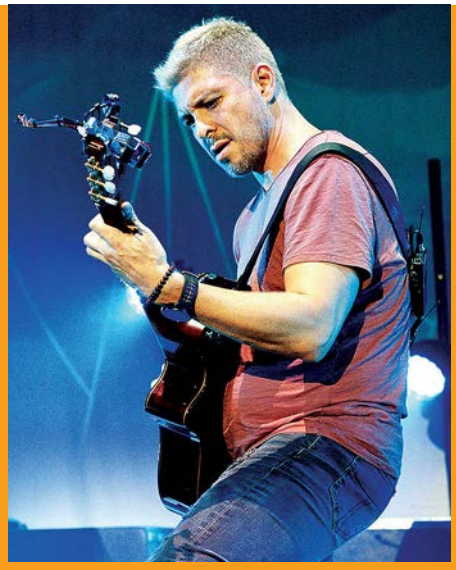
Nylon Steel

Story **Michael Heatley**

A decade on from Rodrigo y Gabriela's breakthrough debut album, the Mexican nylon-string duo have gone from busking the streets to headlining a stage at Glastonbury. We sat down with **Rodrigo Sánchez** to look back at their adventure to date...

It's been a strange old journey from his native Mexico to Barack Obama's iPod, via busking on the streets of Dublin. But for Rodrigo Sánchez, the male half of acoustic duo Rodrigo y Gabriela, revisiting their eponymous breakthrough album 10 years on has reminded him of the challenge of swapping thrash metal for the nylon-strung guitar. The pleasure was such that the pair decided to play the reissued 2007 album in full on dates in Europe and the United States this summer.



"It's hard to believe it's been 10 years since we came out with that album," he smiles. "We will always be connected to it and thankful for it. It's been for us a life-changing experience. It was a different time of our lives when we were living in a country (Ireland) where we never imagined we were going to start doing something very different... So it is very significant, no doubt about it."

The switch to playing acoustics, Rod explains, was born of necessity. "We didn't have electric guitars when we were travelling and that was the reason we left them – we didn't want to carry amplifiers and all that. It was easier and lighter to carry acoustics; we didn't think about it, we were not afraid."

Irish singer-songwriter Damien Rice took them on tour and, five studio albums, three live albums and two film soundtrack efforts later, the rest is history.

Their purely instrumental music, delivered with fire and passion, has attracted an equally intense fan following – President Obama among them. The *Rodrigo y Gabriela* album was produced by John Leckie of Stone Roses fame, and beat the Arctic Monkeys to No 1 in Ireland. Five sold-out nights at the Shepherd's Bush Empire in 2010 announced their arrival as a major force in Britain. Rodrigo and Gabriela Quintero split as a couple two years later, but their professional partnership continued, along with the world touring.

The biggest challenge in the early days, reveals Rod, was "to translate the feeling of being a rock musician and face the ignorance... A lot of people back in the day in Ireland confused the nylon-string guitar with flamenco. A thing we don't play, but we love and respect," he recalls. "That was the hardest part – to create a sound that hadn't been played before. We were metal lovers, still are, but were always open to different kinds of music – jazz, flamenco, you name it – but we were not jazz players, we were not flamenco players. We were teasing crowds with metal >

Left **Gabriela has always locked down the rhythm side of the duo's music, while Rod handles the lead**

Right **Both Rodrigo and Gabriela have been using Yamaha acoustics on stage – Rod uses a NTX1200R, while Gab uses the NCX**

covers among our set of originals; we were playing Slayer, Testament, Metallica and all that so people understood where we were coming from."

Missing the full sound of an electric band at first, they decided to take on multiple roles. "What we did was to translate; we wanted to think that Gabriela was the drummer and the bass player and I was the singer and guitar player. It was kind of a joke, but it was true; we wanted to emulate the sound of a band because we felt we sounded weak. But it's not weak. It's just different."

Having started off feeling their output was 'empty' and 'powerless', the duo widened their listening to take in different kinds of music. "Your ear starts to train yourself without even noticing," he explains. "You realise that no, it's not painful – it's just different. Once your ear gets used to that idea... the sound you produce on the guitar will be much more fulfilling than the one you used to have before you made the transition.

"For a couple of years, I felt I was missing something, especially after playing for years with a full band. Bass, drums and all that. I would go 'Something's missing, it sounds so empty.' And, still, that's why Gab and I write the music that we write. We feel that it's got to be uptempo and tribal, and when we do it live, we still behave like we are in a metal band." A bonus disc included with the CD reissue of the new album from a Dublin show of 2006 underlines the point.

> "We wanted to think that Gabriela was the drummer and the bass player and I was the singer and guitar player"

They may sit down on stage, but RyG gigs are physically and mentally challenging – and they don't hold back. Backstage warm-ups can take up to an hour, while lengthy soundchecks are used to develop new ideas.

Returning to the first album has presented Rod with unexpected challenges. "Now we are practising to play the forthcoming shows it is incredible – how did we do this shit? It's a good opportunity to realise many things about your technique, how can you improve and get back at it."

Three tracks from the 2007 album – *Tamacun*, *Diablo Rojo* and Metallica cover *Orion* – have remained in the set and are now signature tracks. The instruments they were recorded on were made by Irish luthier Frank Tate. "They were our first custom guitars and they're still great," Rod enthuses. "I have mine a metre away from me now; it's the guitar I have in my house."

Soon after the breakthrough album was released, Yamaha made contact as the duo were on tour in Japan. "They promised they were going to do something for us," Rod recalls. "We were having problems with the guitars because, while they were great for the studio, they didn't have the technology to play bigger places, festivals."

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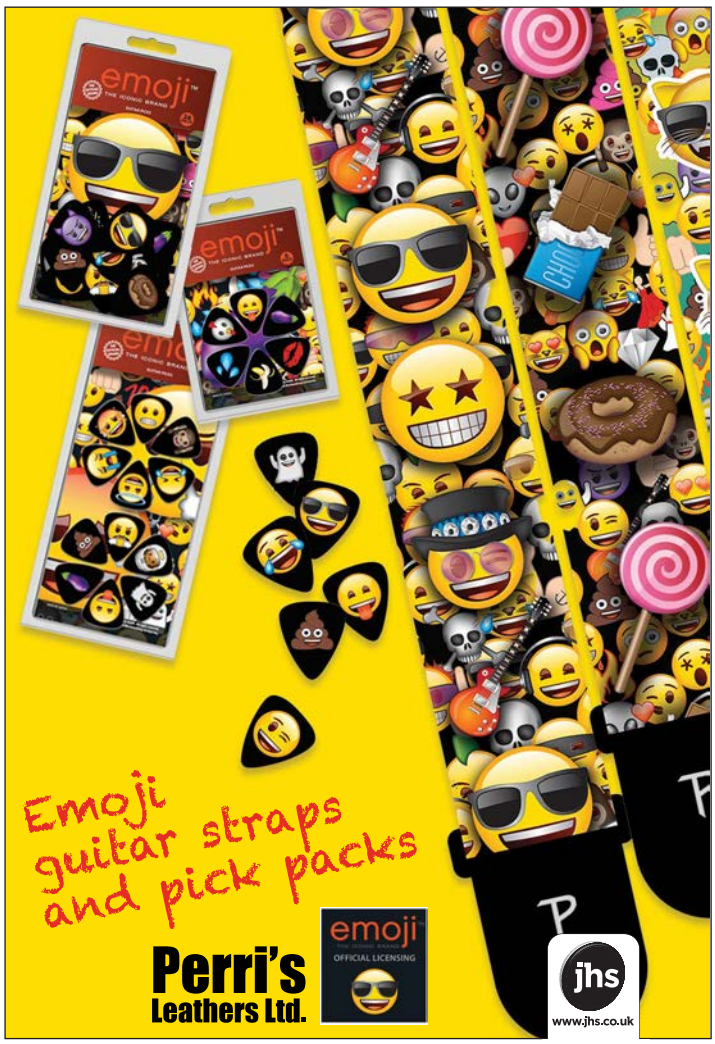
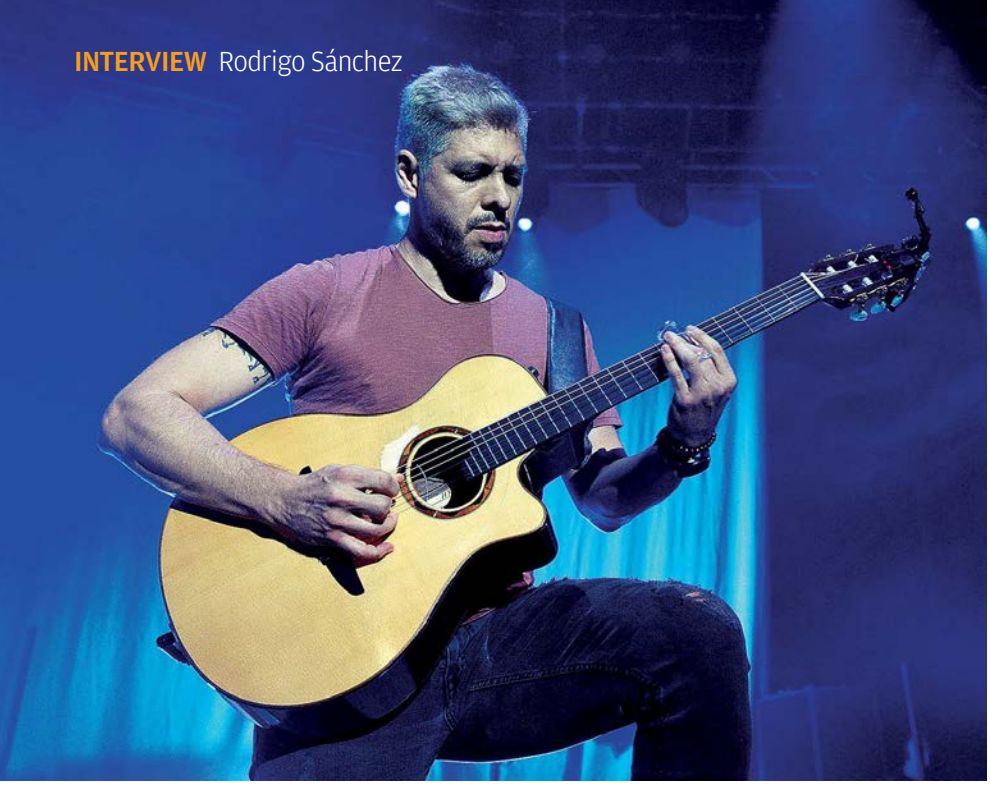




After a support appearance with Muse at Wembley Stadium had been marred by technical problems, Yamaha created a system that overcame the issues with the pickups and the relationship endures. Pick-player Rod favours the slim-necked NTX1200R, with a 14th-fret neck joint, while Gab plays either the NCX1200R or the more traditional-sized and shaped NCX2000R, dividing her attention between addressing the strings fingerstyle and landing percussive blows on the instrument's body. They both use D'Addario Pro Arte' EJ-45 normal tension strings.

"The system Yamaha came up with," Rodrigo explains, "has a little computer inside to separate the frequencies of the two outputs we have, which are the pickups and the piezos. The amount of piezos we have around our guitars, especially Gab's – she has seven different piezos located all around the body, and in my guitar we have five."

Such complexity can bring problems in its wake. "Simple things like the jacks, our guitar techs can fix. But when there's a problem with the computer inside, that's it – they have to be sent to Japan."

The pair travel with four or five guitars each, Gabriela having managed to put two or three out of commission at once with her percussive style. Asked if she treats her guitar more roughly than he does, Rod flashes a good-humoured grin. "Yeah, no doubt about it. She's angry, man!"

There are key differences in the individual instruments they use, notably in the choice of wood. "Sometimes we like a warmer sound with the rosewood and sometimes she uses another. It depends on the room. When we do a soundcheck we decide which one – maple, rosewood or whatever."

On stage effects are limited to a wah pedal apiece, plus a DigiTech unit Rod uses to add some distortion to the more metallic numbers and a pitch-shift pedal to create octaves in a couple of songs.

As a long-time metal fan, Rod admits he hates going to see a band "play a song you like... and hear them improvising solos: I'd think this is not fuckin' jazz, you know! I know that's probably a closed-minded attitude. We change our songs live but we keep the structure, we respect structure. Sometimes we don't do set lists and improvise the set. That way we surprise ourselves and surprise the crowd.

"And we do have a couple of spots during the show where we just improvise – not over a song, but we just jam. That helps break the cycle, because after 100 shows you get really super self-conscious of what you're doing. Sometimes fear can be good. It pushes you to something different."

If you have a urge to sell your electric gear and go fully acoustic, Rod recommends you decide at the outset if you're a solo player or, like him, half of a duo. "Being a solo guitar player is more complex – you have to be more complete. Gab and I are a perfect combination in terms of balance because she is 100 per cent rhythm and I'm 100 per cent lead.

"When I'm on my own it's... fuck, what will I play? If someone is on their own, I would say you have to learn how to play fingerstyle and keep the pick, if you use a pick, on board for different situations you might encounter.

"You have to practise and study your instrument as much as you can, but I think it's more a mental, psychological situation. That's the one to overcome. You have to be yourself, and that's the best advice you can give to any musician.

"When you are so confident about your sound, it comes from beyond. It doesn't come from a pickup being super-powerful, or a piezo, or whatever, it comes from beyond that – that's what you have to look for.

"When you're super-confident at what you do, you kill it."

The Deluxe reissue of Rodrigo y Gabriela's self-titled album is out now on Rubyworks

POWER TRIO

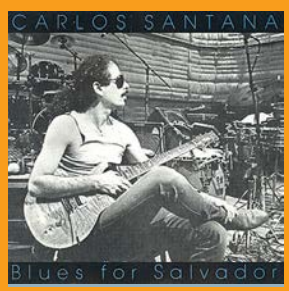
Three guitarists whose contrasting styles have been hugely influential on Rodrigo...

VICENTE AMIGO

"I met him just three or four years ago, and we've become good friends. He's the flamenco king – not much older than us, but has been mine and Gabriela's idol since we were kids. His first album was in the late 90s, I guess, and straight away he got attention from all the media. Paco de Lucía was his godfather and he was a kid prodigy. He grew up under Paco's wing and became the best."

JAMES HETFIELD

"When I was in a metal band, I wanted to play the intricate kind of rhythms James used to play. He was like a teacher for me, he was my professor. Metallica was thriving when I was a kid – *Kill Em All* and beyond. When I met him he had just seen us playing *Orion* live and was saying, 'Man, you played with all your heart.' He saw that we both love what he did and pretty much played music because of Metallica. Meeting James, taking about music and feeling the way he feels music, I confirm that I learned from a genius."



CARLOS SANTANA

"He's one of the few guitarists you hear that has his own signature. You hear Santana's guitar playing and say 'that's him'. When we met him, as well, he was so kind and full of good advice. He embodies stardom well, and he's a really nice person – at least from what I know. Being on stage with him... You would think he would be bored to death playing *Samba Pa Ti* for so many years, but on stage he blows your head away. His tone is incredible."

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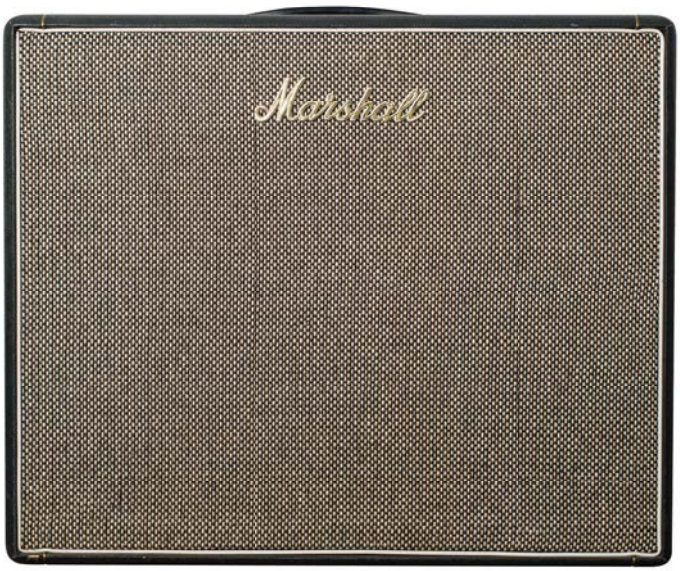
DIY WORKSHOP

MARSHALL 1930 POPULAR

A rare Marshall combo from the amp giant's early days is lucky find indeed – but it's not much good if it doesn't work. It's up to **HUW PRICE** to bring it back to life...



1 The amp is in pretty good condition for its age – the cabinet plate has snapped off, and the tolex has worn off on the corners and there's a bit of tarnish to some of the metal, but other than it's very clean

2 The cabinet contained a treasure trove of period goodies, including the cabinet plate, a Mullard ECC83, the trem footswitch and an official amp schematic from Marshall

How many golden era guitar amps were bought by keen guitarists who, when life got in the way, simply shoved them up the loft to sit unplayed for decades? Being the lucky person to come across such a vintage treasure is one of the ultimate guitar hunter dreams, and that's basically the story of how this Marshall 1930 Popular combo came into the hands of its current custodian.

The Marshall had been bought new, along with an Olympic White Stratocaster, by its original owner, who used it extensively for a number of years, before circumstances caused both to be retired until a house move decades later. Upon discovering it, the Strat was understandably kept for sentimental reasons, but the amp was offered to a guitar playing family friend, who couldn't believe his luck... at least until he turned it on.

Since the amp came out of the loft, the 2x10 combo has emitted a loud wooshing hiss that made it totally unusable, and lacking the know-how to correct the issue himself, this handsome-looking Marshall has remained unused by its owner for over a decade since.

The 1930 Popular is slightly obscure Marshall model – it was only in production from around 1967 to 1973 and it was only sold via mail order. Consequently they're regarded as fairly rare, although that doesn't necessarily mean that few were sold. One theory holds that supplies have dried up because unscrupulous types have been converting 1930s to sell as bona fide 18-watt 1974 models. It would be a fairly easy to do because the 1930 and 1974 models share the same chassis along with the same complement of valve socket holes. Two of these holes are blanked off on the 1930 because it has one fewer preamp valve and solid-state rather than valve rectification.

These were regarded as low-end or 'beginner' amps at the time, and the build quality falls short of Marshall's best standards. Maybe they got the trainees to build them for practice? Even so, it's a favourite studio amp of Dan Baird from The Georgia Satellites and as a proper early Marshall, resale prices are very strong.

You've no doubt heard of 'case candy' so let's say this amp came with 'cabinet candy' courtesy of its original owner. Inside, there was an envelope with a typed address post-marked with a 19/1/73 date containing an official Marshall schematic. This was both helpful and exciting, because I couldn't find this schematic online and the only 1930 diagram that is available is a hand drawn effort containing a couple of component errors – if >

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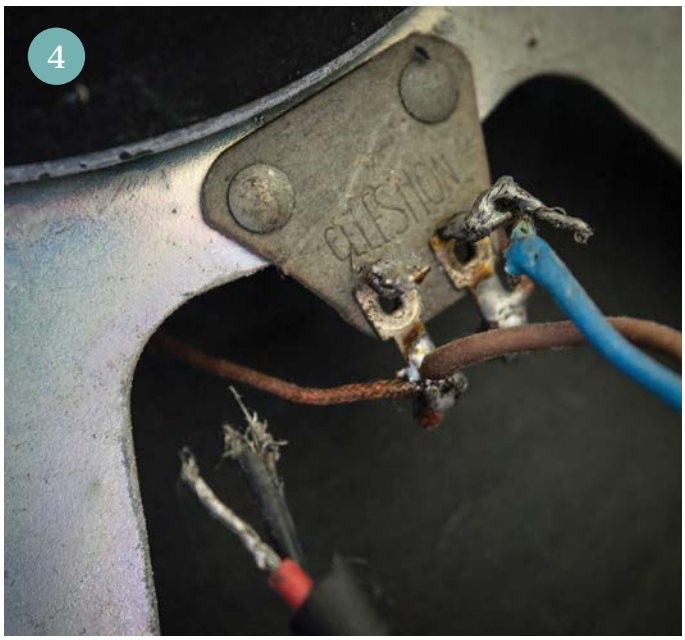
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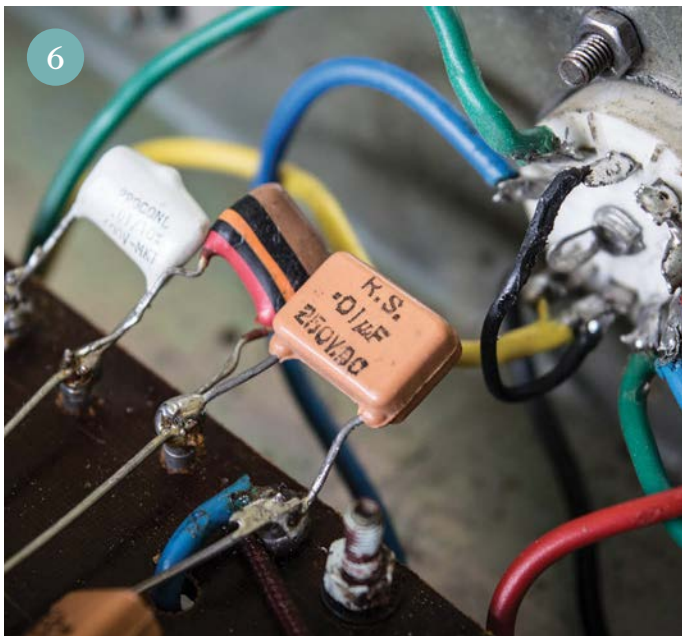
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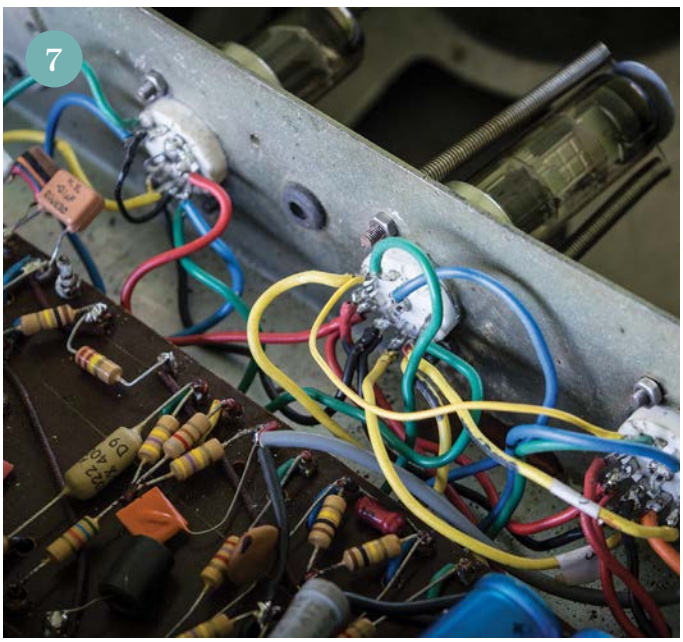
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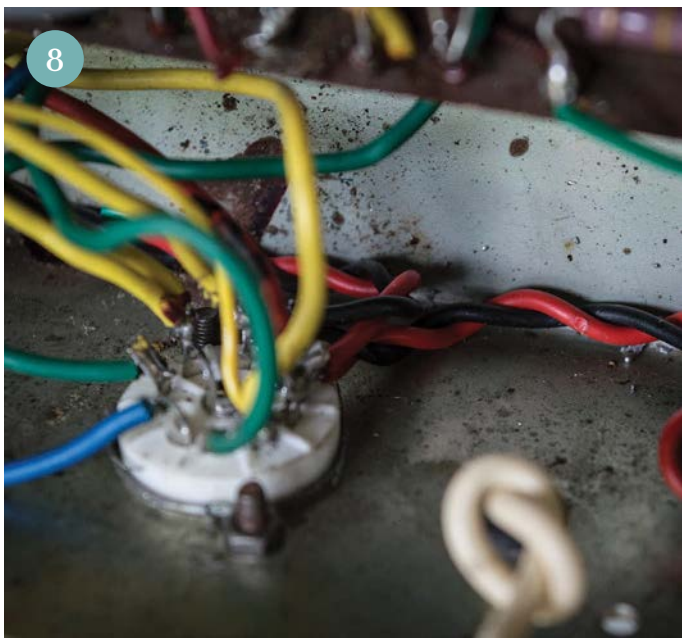
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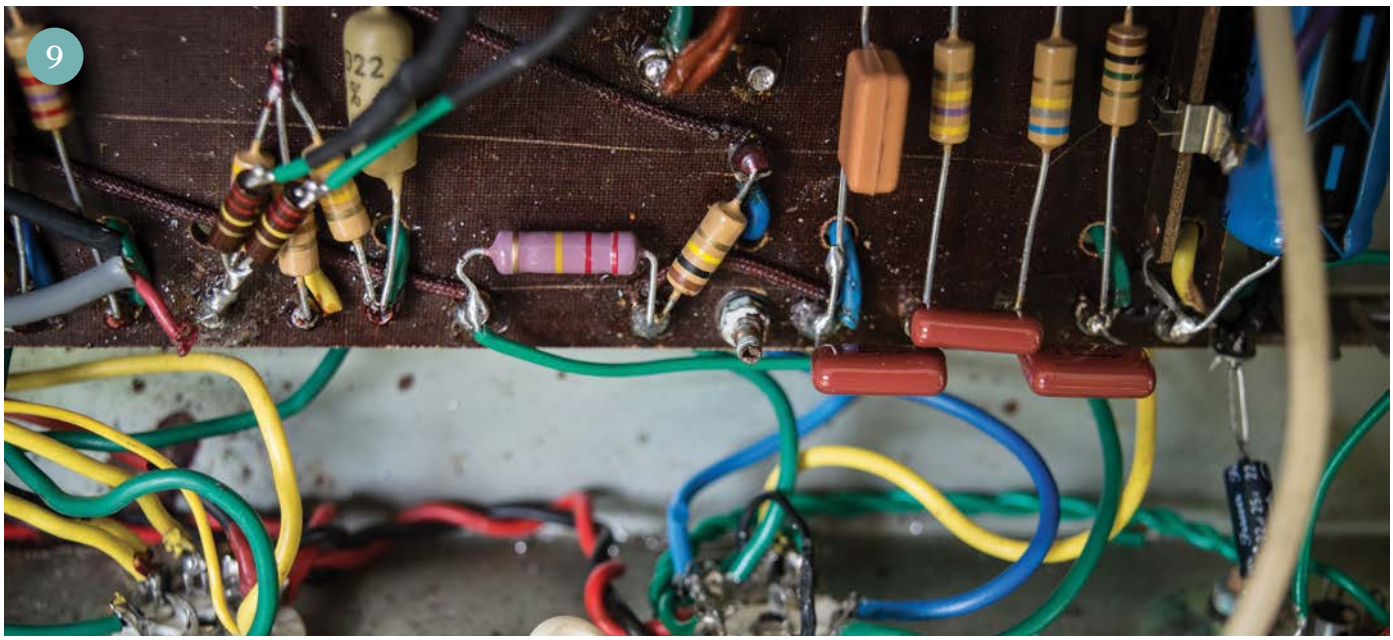


you're restoring your own 1930 and would like to take a look at the schematic, drop us an email.

I also found the Marshall cabinet plate, along with a boxed Mullard ECC83 and a couple of AEG power valves. Unlike the 1974, which runs on EL84s, the 1930 has a pair of ECL86s. These are very similar to the ECL82s used in the WEM Westminster because each glass envelope contains a preamp triode along with a power pentode. The triodes are used as phase inverters/drivers for the power pentodes to generate 10 watts of power.

This 1930 is in great shape cosmetically, and is still fitted with its original Celestion 7442 ceramic speakers. The earliest 1930s had Elac alnicos and a plexiglass control panel, but this one has the brushed metal panel. Some maintenance work had clearly been done over the years, with a handful of replaced capacitors. However the big filter capacitors and most of the carbon film resistors look original.

Before firing up the amp, I give it a thorough inspection. Straight off I notice that only one of the speakers is connected to the output transformer. When I removed the rear panel yet another power valve falls out. I can't even begin to speculate why it was left to rattle around inside. A couple of power supply resistors show signs of heat damage but they measure 'close enough' and the electrolytics are in similarly good shape.

Sorting speakers

I decide to go for it and power up the amp since the owner told me he had done so quite recently. However first I need to re-connect the second speaker. The schematic specifies an eight-ohm load and each of the Celestions measured 16 ohms, so they have to be wired in parallel.

Touching the wires of the second speaker with a nine-volt battery's terminals confirms it's working. It's also a good way to check polarity because the cone will move forwards or backwards depending on which way around the wires are connected. If you can't see it, simply place your finger on the back of the cone and you'll feel it.

I test both speakers this way and mark the positive terminals on each. It soon becomes obvious that the last time these speakers had been used in tandem, they would have been out of phase – with the speakers properly hooked up the amp is ready and raring to go. Well, sort of...

Noise annoys

The owner described the noise as being far from pleasant, and we can confirm this is most certainly the case. However, as nasty as that noise is, it's also a reassuring sign of life, because it means that the mains and output transformers are probably fine. The control pots generate loud scratching sounds, and powering down is accompanied by a prolonged hissing squeal.

The first task is to find where the noise is coming from so first off, I cut the power, pull all the valves out and switch the amp back on. As expected, the only sound coming out of the speakers is a very low level hum. Next, I proceed by powering down, reinserting one of the power valves and turning the amp back on. This time there's a bit more noise coming from the speakers, but well within the norms for amp hum.

Things remain fine with the second power valve installed, but returns with the ECC83 back in position, which means the problem has to be something in the preamp. Changing the valve is always the first option, so I install an ECC83 that I know is good and the noise remains – so no luck on this occasion.

Extreme caution is required for the next procedure, because it's quite dangerous. Placing one hand into my back pocket I hold a long wooden chopstick in the other hand, with the amp switched on, I begin tapping the components with the end of the non-conductive stick [don't try this at home! – Health & Safety Ed].

The 220k plate resistor and two of the tremolo capacitors are all extremely microphonic, so I decide to replace the lot. I also notice that the wiring looks like a rat's nest and, in addition to being in amongst the other wires, the heater wires aren't twisted.

After twisting, tidying and replacing the wiring and suspect >

3 The schematic specifies 32uF+32uF for the 12" speaker 1930s, but the 2x10" versions had 50uF+50uF and this original tests good

4 One of the Celestion speakers had somehow become disconnected

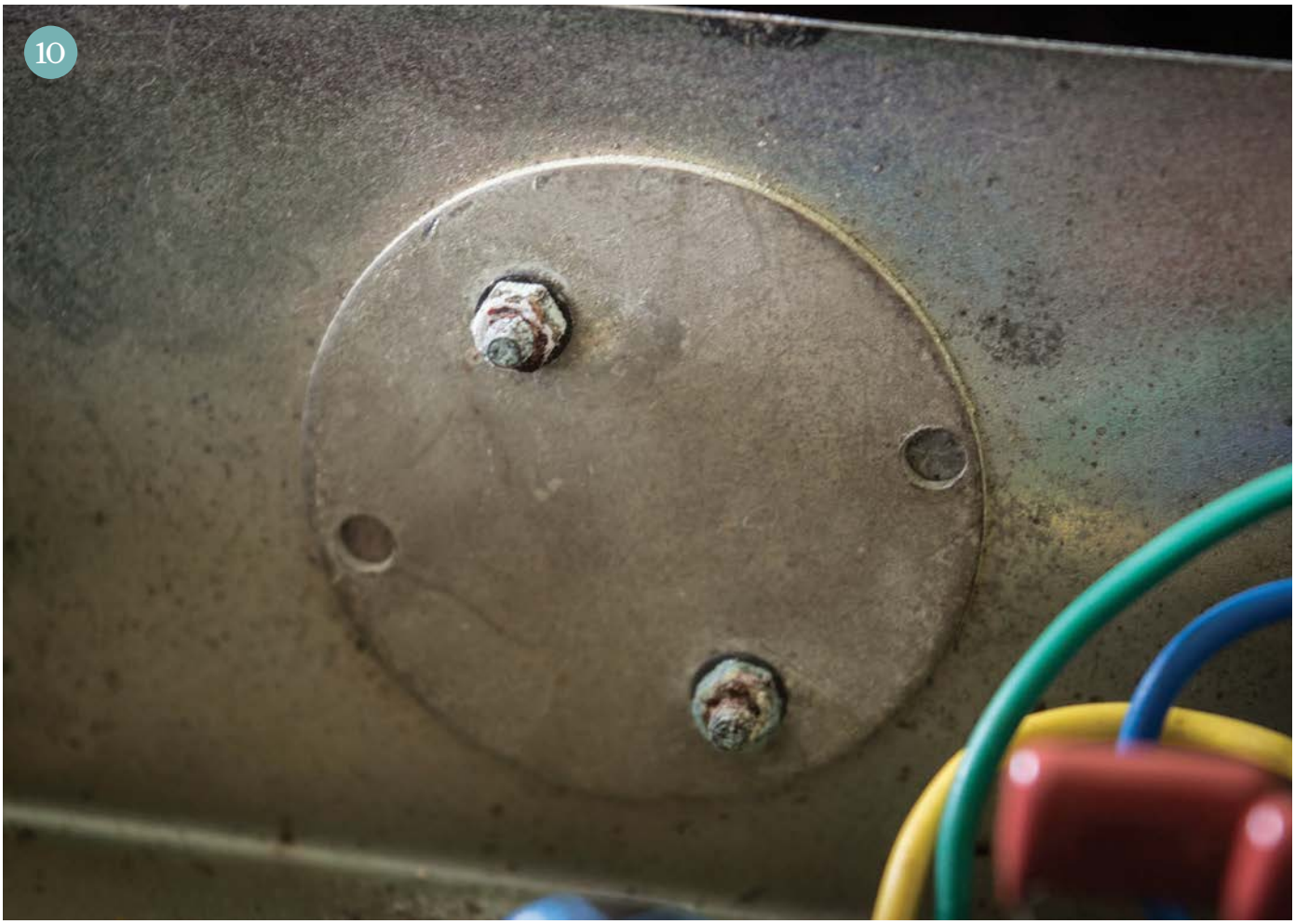
5 This 220K plate resistor was causing noise problems so it had to be removed

6 These 0.01uF capacitors in the tremolo circuit were installed during a previous repair and they were noisy when tapped

7 The wiring is something of a 'rat's nest' with the non-twisted heater wires mixed up with HT and signal wires

8 The heater wires were twisted, re-connected and routed along the chassis fold as far away from the other wires as possible

9 Here's the board with the tremolo capacitors and plate resistor replaced



10 Both of the redundant valve socket holes were blanked off with metal disks bolted to the chassis

11 Half way through fitting an extra valve socket with one bolt attached and one to go

12 A tag strip was installed just behind the valve socket and the socket was hooked up to operate a single triode

components, noise levels drop considerably. The squealing during switch-off is also cured, but I still feel it has more hiss and hum than I would like. However, in this regard, the 1930 is simply living up to its reputation as a rather noisy amp, and the root cause is the circuit design itself.

The fundamental issue

Even with the wiring sorted and the components in tip top condition, this would never have been a 'quiet' amp. The issue is that the volume and tone controls are situated between the screen grid resistors and the grid of valve. What's more, the two channels are joined by a couple of 470k mixer resistors, which attenuate the guitar signal before it even reaches the valve. The volume and tone controls of valve amps – including most Marshalls – should come after the first valve stage. Each valve stage generates noise, so by placing the volume control after the valve you can turn down the noise and your guitar signal simultaneously.

Most of us are prepared to accept noise when the amp is cranked to the maximum. Hiss and hum will be apparent, but the guitar signal will also be at its loudest, so the signal to noise ratio is acceptable. With the 1930's circuit, all the noise being generated is passed onto the phase inverter and the power valves unchecked. You can turn down the guitar signal but so far as the noise is concerned, it's as if the amp is running at full volume at all times. What's more, placing all the extra components between the volume control and the grid ensures that a lot of unwanted extra noise is picked up.

The only way to sort the noise issue completely was to connect the screen grid resistors directly onto the grid and reconnect the control circuitry between V1 and the phase inverter, however there's a slight complication.

The 1930 was an amp built to a price rather than a standard, and installing one fewer valve stages was a way for Marshall to lower costs and reduce build time. This really should have been a one-channel amplifier with tremolo or a two-channel amplifier without tremolo, but Marshall decided to have both.

Consequently they had to place all the controls and the passive mixer components straight after the inputs so both channels could share the same triode stage. This arrangement left the second triode stage available for use as an oscillator.

Rather than make one set of inputs redundant, I decide to make use of the blanked off preamp valve socket to install an extra valve, meaning that the 1930 could be a genuine two-channel amp with tremolo on one channel. There's also the potential to voice the non-tremolo channel for a different tone with perhaps a bit more gain.

Shifting the stack

Turning this 1930 into a bona fide two-channel amp actually proves to be quite straightforward. I chat with Chris Fantana of Rift Amps and we decide that the mains transformer was probably rated for a 2A current draw for the

valve heaters, so it will be able to handle one extra ECC83. To keep things simple, the new channel will henceforth be referred to as the 'normal' channel and the other will be known as the 'tremolo' channel.

I begin by disconnecting the all four 68k grid resistors from the volume pots then I disconnect the 10nF coupling capacitors from the 470k mixer resistors. The 470k mixer resistors and the 1M resistor tying the grid (pin 7) of V1 to ground are all removed from the circuit board and the 68ks of the tremolo channel are soldered together and attached to an extension wire to connect to the green wire leading to Pin 7.

The 500pF connecting the anode (pin 6) of V1 to the grid of the ECL86 triode stage (pin 1) and 470k resistor is then lifted at the ECL86 end and soldered directly onto the volume pot. With the 10nF capacitor leading from the output of the tone pot soldered onto the ECL86 Pin 6/470k junction, the relocation of the controls from pre-V1 to post-V1 is now complete.

Adding a channel

I now have a proper tremolo channel and the amp is running quieter than ever. However, I also have two inputs leading to nowhere, and a couple of redundant controls. The spare preamp socket hole is blanked off with a disk-shaped metal plate held onto the chassis by two bolts. This is easy to remove and I install a new valve socket. Just in front of this socket there's a preexisting hole in the chassis, so I use it to mount a short length of tag strip for the new valve connections. Since no extra hole was required, all these mods could easily be reversed if anybody wanted to return this amp to the circuit and layout that it left the factory with.

Only one half of the extra triode is required so I configure it like a 1974 18-watt Marshall with a 100k plate resistor connected to pin 1 and a 1K5 cathode resistor from pin 3 bypassed with a 25uF electrolytic capacitor. The 68k grid resistors are tied together and extended to fix onto the grid (pin 2) and pin 1 is connected >

14 The two channels are joined by 220k mixer resistors at the phase inverter with that pesky 22nF mustard capacitor in the background

to the volume control via a 0.0047uF coupling capacitor.

Crossing the channels

My initial plan had been to connect the new channel to the 470k resistor on the other side of the phase inverter. It works, but sounds terrible – with low gain and excessive treble roll off. The issue is no doubt related to the 22nF capacitor tying the grid to ground, and lifting the grounded end certainly restores the gain and treble. However it also introduces a load of noise and wild oscillation.

Talking it over with Chris Fantana, he suggests the capacitor was probably a 'band aid' used as a quick fix for an oscillation issue with the circuit. After trying unsuccessfully to remedy the problem, I reconnect the 22nF capacitor and join the channels via a pair of 220k mixer resistors on the other side of the phase inverter.

Final touches

Finally everything was running properly and, as I'd hoped, the new '18-watt' channel sounded fatter, deeper and warmer than the brighter and more aggressive tremolo channel. Of course the tremolo itself still isn't working and I'd like to repair the broken cabinet plate, but I'll save that for later. All things considered, the Marshall 1930 in stock form isn't a particularly good amp, but with a few minor tweaks it can be transformed into something pretty amazing!

NEXT MONTH...

As if he didn't have enough work to do in order to complete his Greco LP-style Goldtop conversion, Huw embarks on an acoustic build using a Martin guitar kit. Expect colourful language and sawdust to fill the air!

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Godin Montreal Premiere LTD

A limited run of the Canadian company's thinline semi that boasts a tweaked spec, super-cool looks and something of a revelation inside. **SIMON BRADLEY** goes through the f-hole...

Godin periodically offers limited-run versions of selected electrics across its ranges, which often equates to a pertinent change of spec and a number of non-standard finishes. The Montreal Premiere is the Canadian company's slant on a thinline semi-acoustic that's constructed along mostly traditional lines, and part of the 'limited' classification of this example is that the Godin pickups loaded into the remainder of the range are replaced by TV Jones Classics. In addition, the whole shebang has been given a striking Desert Blue finish.

Initially at least, the whole package brings Gretsch to mind, but as it turns out, the Montreal Premiere actually sits somewhere between a single-cut Jet (were it fully semi-hollow as opposed to chambered) and a Gibson ES-335 or 339 (were they single-cuts). The most notable feature resides within the cherry laminate body, where you'll find a centre block of Adirondack spruce, which has been dubbed a 'breathe-through' core.

There are three 'arches' that are carved through the core's lower half with the idea being to give the best of a centre block – increased sustain and stability alongside reduced feedback – with the established tonal benefits of a fully hollow-bodied guitar. The carving is undertaken by hand and, although the guitar's weight is unavoidably increased by the spruce inside, we feel this is a inventive concept somewhere between trestle bracing and a traditional centre-block .

Godin has long been at the forefront of sustainability and the utilisation of eco-friendly practices, and this is continued by the use of Richlite as the fretboard material. A resilient substance composed of recycled paper infused with phenolic resin, Richlite is seeing increased use in the guitar manufacturing world as a viable replacement to both ebony and rosewood – not least by the likes of Martin and Gibson. It doesn't splinter or shrink or possess a grain of any kind, and the series of split hexagonal mother-of-pearl inlays only increases the guitar's blingtastic look.

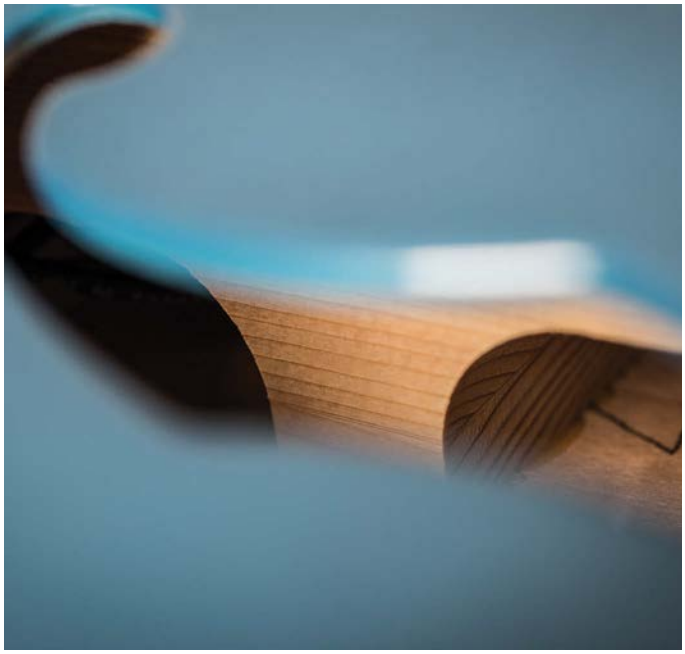
What's more, Gibson has stated that Richlite is actually a more expensive material to work with than ebony, which did surprise us, and we'll get to how it feels and sounds in due course. Kudos to Godin for also taking the plunge, and the fact that it's good enough for use on the sumptuous Gibson ES-355 VOS, let alone the iconic Les Paul Custom, will hopefully assuage any lingering doubts regarding its suitability.

> It's designed to give the best of a centre block with the tonal benefits of a hollowbody guitar

Elsewhere, Godin has opted for a Bigsby Licensed B-70 vibrato, a die-cast version of the B-7. Its design incorporates a tension bar

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

We love the sparkle blue finish and cool vintage vibe of **Duesenberg**'s **Mike Campbell Signature Starplayer TV** (**c£2,699**) while, for more modest budgets, the Limited Edition **Gretsch Electromatic G5420**, boasting dual Filter'Trons and a Bigsby B-60, is great value at around **£865**. **Epiphone**'s Blue Royale edition of the underrated and P-90-loaded **Wildcat** semi can be snapped up for under **£400**



KEY FEATURES

Godin Montreal Premiere LTD

- **PRICE:** £1,949 (inc Godin TRIC case)
- **DESCRIPTION:** Thinline semi-acoustic electric. Made in Canada
- **BUILD:** Laminated wild cherry top, back and sides with 'breathe-through' spruce core, engraved 4-ply pearloid scratchplate, and white binding. High-gloss polyurethane finish. Set silver leaf maple neck with 12"/300mm radius Richlite fingerboard and white Tusq nut, 22 medium-jumbo frets and split hexagonal m-o-p inlays
- **HARDWARE:** Licensed Bigsby B-70 vibrato, tune-o-matic bridge with roller saddles, and Godin tuners, all chrome
- **ELECTRICS:** Two TV Jones Classic humbuckers. Volume and tone pots, plus three-way toggle
- **SCALE LENGTH:** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH:** 43.6mm at nut, 52.6mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH:** 23.5mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING:** 36.7mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT:** 7.3lbs/3.31kg
- **FINISH:** Desert Blue only
- **OPTIONS:** Version with the exact same spec save a standard tune-o-matic bridge and stop tail is £1,849. The standard Montreal Premiere range starts at £1,299 for versions loaded with either Godin humbuckers or P-90 pickups. The Montreal Premiere Supreme goes for £1,699, while the Montreal Premiere Tripleplay, with on-board Fishman Tripleplay system and hexaphonic pickup, is £1,749. The standard 5th Avenue Uptown archtop range begins at £1,099, with the limited version coming in at £1,599
- **LEFT-HANDERS:** No
- **CONTACT:** 440 Distribution 0113 443 3145 **www.godinguitars.com**

under which the strings are fed that increases downward pressure over the bridge that, here, is thoughtfully equipped with roller saddles. The bar is stiffer to depress than the B3 we have fitted to our Gretsch Nashville, but it's certainly not difficult to become comfortable with and the array as a whole is, of course, intimately connected to the aforementioned spruce core for a purer tone.

Although the more traditional Gretsch fan may rue the lack of myriad controls and switches, those of a more practical ilk will, like us, be perfectly happy with the single volume and tone pots and straightforward three-way toggle.

There's a little finish build-up around the heel and neck join, but we can live with that, as the finishing both here and on the maple neck is perfectly smooth. What's more, as is usually the case with Godin Guitars, we're impressed by the standard of the overall construction.

In Use

Strapped on, the guitar is moderately weighty but not excessively so, and is nicely balanced. We have to be honest; we didn't even notice the fingerboard until we were well into our sound tests, and we have absolutely no issues with it. It's been well fitted and is mirror smooth, especially when compared to the lower grade of ebony we have on one of our control guitars. What influence it has on the tone will most likely be to add a certain tightness to the high-end but we're not convinced anyone would pass a blindfold test between Richlite and ebony. The neck's soft D profile is a joy to grasp along its entire length, which, again, is all we could ask for.

The bridge TV Jones is hotter and therefore gnarlier than its unashamedly more vintage partner and, with an amp set just to break up, the difference in the pair's unadulterated tones is marked. There's a distinct lack of Gretschy honk from the bridge pickup, with the bass strings offering sufficient lower-end to counteract the nicely snarky and sustaining treble. That said, the fact that it doesn't really sound like a Gretsch isn't an issue for us – it sits somewhere between that and the middly warmth of an ES-335 and we could certainly see the Montreal sounding at home with rockabilly, blues and even indie styles.

> The Montreal would sound at home with rockabilly, blues and even indie styles

The guitar really comes into its own with the neck pickup. Based on a 1959 Filter'Tron it's full and warm, as expected, but there's also an expressiveness to the treble that ensures even complex jazz chords never sound cluttered or indistinct. Flicking to the central position brings the treble strings further to the fore without excessively brightening proceedings and we'd suggest that this setting would give already mellow jazz solos just the right amount of edge.

The Bigsby can return a couple of cents flat after being depressed to its full extent, but that's a familiar quirk experienced players will be adept at dealing with; getting into the habit of quickly pulling the bar up past centre to disperse friction is par for the course. Remember that there is also a version of the Montreal LTD that comes loaded with a standard tune-o-matic/stoptail array.

We feel that owners of either a 6120 or ES-335 would get plenty from the Montreal Premiere as it offers tones that are mostly of its own devising. The overall quality of the construction and performance more than justifies the price tag and, if you're in the market for a semi that has tones to match its stunning looks, not to mention an irrefutable feel of exclusivity, this might just be it.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Versatile tonal performance
+ Innovative construction
+ Striking finish
+ Special neck

- Minor finishing issues
- Some Bigsby tuning quirks

A versatile guitar that genuinely offers the best bits of Gibson and Gretsch semis with tones and a striking look of its own

8/10

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Rivolta GUITARS BY·DENNIS·FANO

The COMBINATA is available in four colour choices – Adriatic Blue Metallic, Pomodoro Red Metallic, Toro Black Metallic and Autunno Burst. The Standard model features a compensated wraptail bridge, while the Deluxe Trem model sports a Duesenberg Les Trem II with a roller saddle bridge.

The COMBINATA is the evolution of a design with which followers of Dennis Fano should be very familiar. The larger and slightly offset body give the COMBINATA a shapely silhouette and more substantial feel. The chambered mahogany body features a German carve top (mahogany on metallics, maple on burst). The 25" scale maple set-neck sports the comfortably chunky "Rivolta C+" neck profile, with 24 medium jumbo frets and a bound rosewood fingerboard.

Rivolta Guitars by Dennis Fano available at Coda Music

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Fano RB6 Standard

Twin P-90 pickups? Wrapover bridge? Retro stylings? Sounds like a job for **CHRIS VINNICOMBE**...

Fano's Standard Series expanded for 2017 to include more shapes from the upscale Alt De Facto line designed by Dennis Fano before he left to launch Novo Guitars in October 2015. The compact lines of the German-carved RB6 saw Dennis draw on the 50s Rickenbacker Combo 800, while the specifications here are a tip of the hat to Fullerton by way of an alder body and bolt-on maple neck, and Kalamazoo via the 24.75-inch scale length, wrapover bridge and pair of P-90 pickups.

Standards are offered in a rainbow of 'Custom Colour' finishes and a choice of two levels of artificial ageing: New Old Stock and Medium Distress, the latter seen here with aged hardware, simulated forearm wear, dings, checking and much of the gloss missing from the back of the neck. The finish-ageing is a little rudimentary (when wood has been exposed by rub-through, it would typically be darkened by oxidisation and grime) and the Surf Green's toothpaste zing is rather box-fresh. The Indian rosewood fingerboard could also use a little oil.

All that said, we don't imagine that it will be long before the RB6 sustains its fair share of genuine battle-scars – subjecting it to an acoustic strum is a refreshingly direct experience. We can't wait to plug in...

In Use

It may be a bolt-on, but the rounded neck profile and pitched headstock reinforce the RB6's LP Special vibe.

With the volume rolled back there's plenty of that pseudo-acoustic character we often talk about, while the compound fingerboard radius helps ensure that the RB6 is not just a rhythm machine – it's an easy-player above the 12th fret, too. This allows you to take full advantage of the elasticity of the scale length and

> Rock 'n' roll standards are given a sense of vitality by the RB6's bark and dynamic response

We immediately wind our small tweed amp up into crunch territory and wheel out the raunchy rock 'n' roll clichés, but any old tricks are given a sense of vitality by the RB6's bark and dynamic response.

It's not only about The Stones, the Faces, Aerosmith and punk-rock powerchords; just as we were impressed by the Fano Standard JM6's OEM humbuckers back in 2016, the P-90s here deliver a lovely mixture of sparkle and grit that has more in common with vintage hand-wound boutique units than it does modern, mass-produced examples.

enjoy some juicy and expressive lead tones through all three positions of the toggle switch. As you'd expect from such a simple instrument, there are bags of sustain and harmonics to play with, while the RB6's materials and bolt-on construction help lend a Fender-like snap and twang to clean tones when required.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

With a street price of **£511**, **Yamaha's Revstar RS502** is an affordable and stylish way to get a slice of P-90-loaded, wrapover bridge action. **Gibson Custom** has given the **Les Paul Special Single Cut** an array of Firebird finishes for 2017 including Kerry Green and Pelham Blue, but the street price of **£3,099** is approaching vintage money. For a more affordable Dennis Fano design with a wrapover bridge and P-90s, check out the **Rivolta Combinata** (**£1,099**)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Comfortable neck finish and profile
+ Combines the snappy attack of a bolt-on with set-neck-like sustain
+ Ageing job not as artful as some
+ The unstable pound makes quality US guitars less attainable

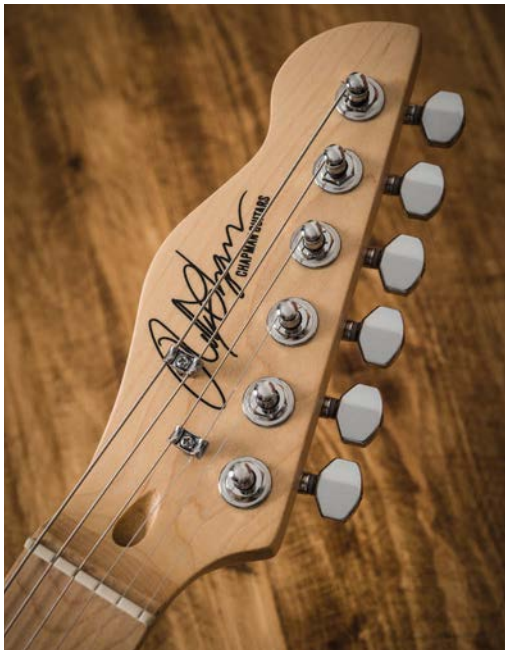
Retro looks aside, this is a real player's guitar for those who value tone and feel over bells and whistles

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fano RB6 Standard

- **PRICE** £1,989 (inc gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body with carved top, bolt-on maple neck with 'late 50s round back' profile, Indian Rosewood fingerboard with compound 10-16" radius, 22 Jescar '6105' frets
- **HARDWARE** Fano Wraparound 6-saddle bridge, vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Fano P-90 pickups, master volume, master tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at 1st fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 51.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.3lb/3.3kg
- **FINISH** Surf Green nitrocellulose. Also available in Bull Black, Olympic White, Ice Blue Metallic, Candy Apple Red, Sonic Blue, Inca Silver, Shoreline Gold. All finishes available with Medium Distress (as reviewed) or NOS ageing levels
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **coda-music.com** **fanoguitars.com**



Chapman Guitars ML3 Pro Traditional & ML1 Traditional

NAMM 2017 saw the Chapman Guitars range split into Pro and Standard lines. **SIMON BRADLEY** finds out what makes these revamped Chapmans tick...

We're pretty sure that most of you reading this will be aware of Rob Chapman, whether as the super-popular YouTube personality, or as the guitarist and frontman of prog-metal band, Dorje. Most of us would probably be satisfied with online stardom, but Chappers isn't one to rest on his digital laurels.

In 2009 Rob teamed up with his YouTube co-host Lee Anderton of Andertons Music to create a range of guitars that would be designed in full collaboration with Chapman's large and loyal online fanbase. The guitars were a hit, and now after 18 months spent readdressing the entire concept and taking on feedback from users, Chapman Guitars splurged 29 new models at this year's NAMM show in California.

The catalogue has now been split down the middle, with the Pro Series continuing to be made in Korea, while guitars from the Standard Series now originate from Indonesia. We have an example from each range on test; the single-cut ML3 Pro Traditional and double-cut ML1 Traditional from the Standard range.

The ML3 Pro – with its two-piece swamp ash body, carved top, glow-in-the-dark side dots and Hipshot open-gear tuners – resembles something that Billy Gibbons might saunter on stage with. Meanwhile, although it sits at a lower price point, the ML1 offers a custom shop, almost Tom Anderson vibe. The solid ash body bears a paper-thin veneer of highly-figured ash, with a 5mm masked strip of natural wood giving the illusion of a genuinely separate top. It's very clever indeed.

Both guitars possess stainless steel frets and reverse headstocks, and are loaded with their own specifically-voiced brace of Chapman pickups fixed directly to the body. The quality oozing from each belies their modest price tags.

In Use

The vibrancy of the high-end response is immediately apparent upon plugging in. Both guitars possess treble not only in spades, but in clubs, hearts and diamonds as well. If you advocate that the twang is the thang, you'll be in hog's heaven.

Thanks to the considerable acoustic volume afforded by its swamp ash body, the ML3 performs like a Tele on steroids – even the high-end attenuation offered by the instrument's sextet of brass saddles can't hold back the ML3's zing. Cleanly, and with a daub of reverb, the high-end really cuts and although its 'hotter than vintage' sizzle may be too much for some, our ersatz country licks sound great. Adding a tad more gain obviously adds treble, but the ML3 retains a pleasant, woody girth and we're confident that modern blues and hot country players will appreciate the quality of the tone.

Even though our hopes that the ML3's ZZ Top vibe would be translated to its sonics are ultimately dashed (elsewhere in the range, the

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's **Jimi Hendrix Strat** (**£769**) mixes a reverse headstock and bridge pickup with that iconic vibe while, for the ultimate in reasonably bank-friendly Fender workhorses, we'd suggest the **Classic Player Baja Tele** (**£809**), whose spec includes the S-1 Switching System and Custom Shop pickups.
LTD's **TE-254** (**£464**) includes a neck humbucker and a distressed finish alongside more traditional T-style appointments, and the range of lovely **Godin Session** electrics starts at just (**£529**). At the other end of the scale sits the beyond-awesome **Anderson T Classic** for around **£2,900** depending on spec. There's also the cave of wonders that is the **Fender Custom Shop**

ML3 Pro Modern's humbuckers will cure any disappointment) the guitar holds on to its identity at higher gain settings. Big chords are encased in levels of treble that refuse to be ignored and the obvious advantage here is that single- and double-note passages, not to mention solos, have an edge that should cut through anything.

The ML1's voice is more straightforward. Both cleanly and with a touch of amp gain, the tone is focussed, bright and in your face, and higher overdrives accentuate the treble yet further. The strings tend to stick in the nut if you make an attempt to go the full Van Halen on the vibrato, but we stop short of breaking out the Nut Sauce or, indeed, a set of our preferred 0.010s. Both guitars are strung 0.009 to 0.042 out of the box – as usual, giving the wires a stretch is a pertinent move.

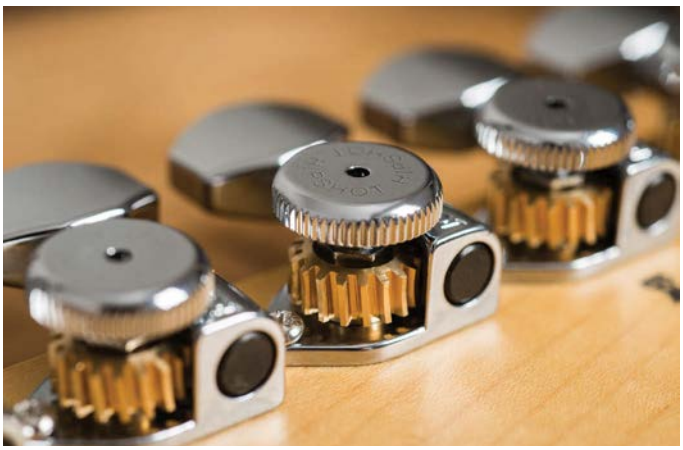
We should also point out that, although it comes loaded with a trio of single-coils, the ML1 really doesn't sound as similar to a Stratocaster as you might expect. Don't get us wrong; the five-way blade selector's wiring does supply the same tonal bases, but there's an extended high-end and reduced mids when compared to our reference Fender Classic Player 50s Strat. We don't consider this a negative: the fact that the ML1 offers tonal alternatives to the archetypal three single-coil solidbody is something of which we absolutely approve.

Although the ML1's voice is not especially suited to faithfully recreating the huge blues tones of the likes of SRV or Walter Trout, a gnarly fuzzbox slapped in front of the amp imparts an uncompromising lead tone that'd sear faces and melt eardrums: again, it offers something different to the norm.

One thing we notice with both guitars is the reduced efficiency of the tone controls when attempting to temper the treble. When seeking to round off sharpness, the tone pots don't really make any audible difference past a point approximately a third of the way around its rotation. In comparison to our control guitars, the tone goes from a citric zing to muffled with hardly any gradient; food for thought, maybe.

That's the only gripe, though, and the standard of the satin finishing on both necks, the playability afforded by the rolled edges of the fingerboards, and the build quality as a whole is a true testament to what Chapman Guitars is trying to achieve. Both play beautifully and, with the ML1 coming in at a mere £429 and the ML3 Pro well worth its £769 tag, we're utterly enamoured. Of the two we'd probably take the ML3, but if the remainder of the range is as good as this, we're sold.

We're confident that modern blues and hot country players will appreciate the tone



KEY FEATURES

Chapman Guitars ML3 Pro Traditional

- **PRICE** £769 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cut, solidbody electric. Made in Korea
- **BUILD** 2-piece swamp ash body with 2-piece carved swamp ash top with satin finish. 1-piece, bolt-on maple neck with satin finish. Rolled-edge maple fingerboard with 9.8"/250mm radius, 22 stainless steel jumbo frets, glow-in-the-dark side dots, black Infinity marker at 12th fret, white Tusq nut and reverse Straight Heritage headstock
- **HARDWARE** T-Style bridge with individual brass saddles, roller string trees, strap locks, and chrome Hipshot Grip-Lock open-gear locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x T-style Chapman Mojo Hand single coils, single volume and tone pots plus 3-way blade selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 57mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.5mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6.6lbs/3kg
- **FINISH** Triton (as reviewed), Shadow
- **OPTIONS** ML3 Pro Modern (£769), ML3 Traditional (£399), ML3 Modern (£399), ML3 BEA Rabea Massaad Baritone (£1,199)

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Very cool look
+ Huge T-type tones
+ Offers something new
+ Wonderful player

– High end can be overpowering
– Restricted tone pot play

With its lovely neck, ergonomic body design and custom appointments, this is a truly impressive T-type for the modern player that genuinely offers something different

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Chapman Guitars ML1 Traditional

- **PRICE** £429 (inc gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cut, solidbody electric. Made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Solid ash body with ash top veneer, with gloss finish and natural binding. 1-piece, bolt-on maple neck with satin finish. Rolled-edge maple fingerboard with 9.4"/240mm radius, 22 nickel jumbo frets, black side and front dots, black Infinity marker at 12th fret, white Tusq nut and reverse Straight Heritage headstock
- **HARDWARE** 2-point floating vibrato with brass block and individual brass saddles, traditional string trees and chrome Chapman tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Chapman Venus Witch Zero single coils, single volume and tone pots plus 5-way blade selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm scale
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.2lbs/3.25kg
- **FINISH** Coffee (as reviewed), Lunar
- **OPTIONS** ML1 Modern (£399), ML1 Modern Baritone (£449), ML1 Pro Traditional (£869), ML1 Pro Modern (£969)
- **CONTACT** Andertons Music 01483 456777 **chapmanguitars.co.uk**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Palpable custom vibe with impressive spec
+ Great price
+ Lovely neck

– Minor tuning issues
– Again, the treble is fierce

Any player would get a great deal from this well-made instrument that looks and plays like something three times the price. We'd consider restringing with 0.010s, though

8/10

The Power of Portability | **POWER**STAGE **170**

Did you ever wish your entire rig could fit on your pedalboard? Designed and voiced for players who demand the most from their effects, the PowerStage 170 is the ultimate portable power solution. Plug into any cabinet and go!

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Rift Amplification Tweed 5TV & 15TV

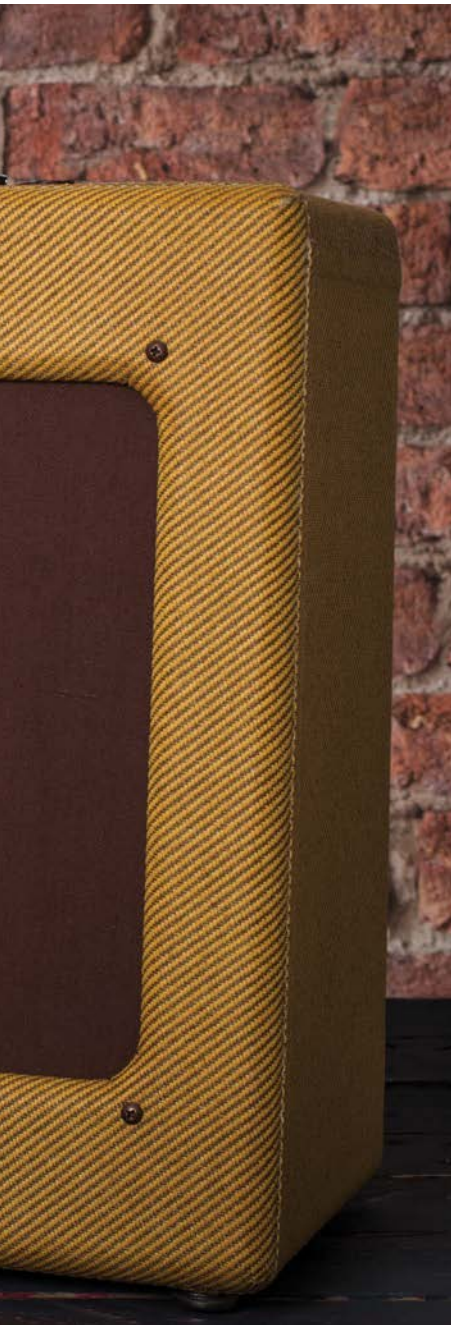
Despite being tone monsters, Leo Fender's early TV front amplifiers are less sought-after than later narrow-panel tweeds. **HUW PRICE** finds out if Rift's interpretations of the 5A2 Princeton and 5A3 Deluxe circuits are boxing clever...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

So far as we're aware, nobody else is currently making faithful recreations of TV front Princeton or Deluxe amps. However, if the idea of these amp circuits appeals, the options are to source a TV front cabinet and build your own by adapting late-50s style chassis or splash out for a vintage example

Launched in 1955, Fender's 'narrow panel' 5E3 Deluxe went on to attain legendary status. Vintage prices have been buoyant for many years and few boutique amp builders and kit suppliers don't offer a 5E3 variant of some sort. Meanwhile, less fancied Deluxe models have lagged behind in value, and until fairly recently, you could pick up earlier 'TV front' Deluxes for less than four figures. Sadly those days are gone and clean examples will now set you back over £2,500.

This reviewer has owned a 1951 5A3 Deluxe for over a decade, and a mutual love of old tweed amps saw us assist Chris Fantana of Rift Amplification by supplying the cabinet dimensions, internal voltages and circuit specifics of our vintage original when Chris began planning his own version of a 5A3, the amp that has become the Rift Tweed 15TV.



Creating a faithful tribute to a niche 60-year-old amp has practical hurdles: no parts suppliers Chris could find produced a 5A3-style chassis, and TV-fronted cabinets of the right dimensions are equally scarce. As a result, while the circuit, valve compliment, voltages and so forth are identical, the chassis has four inputs rather than three and the cabinet is very slightly larger.

As if making one faithful recreation wasn't enough, having seen Johan Segeborn's YouTube video of a 5A2 Princeton giving a 5E3 the fight of its life, Fantana decided that he was going to create a single-ended version. For the 5TV, Chris made a more significant departure from the vintage formula by opting for an oversized cabinet. As well as filling out the tone and reducing some boxiness, the larger TV-fronted cab means that customers can spec the 5TV with a period-correct eight-inch speaker, or a larger 10-inch driver. You can even order a Rift 5TV with a larger cabinet and a 12-inch speaker. Our review example comes with the standard Warehouse G8C ceramic.

Like all Rift amps, the Tweed TV models are hand-built to order, and options include speaker choice, aged tweed, jewel light colour and alternative signal capacitors. In the case of the latter, you have a choice of red or yellow Jupiter units.

Red Jupiters are polyester film and tin foil capacitors similar to the type Fender used during the TV front era, whereas the yellows are sonically closer to the Astron capacitors used in wide- and narrow-panel tweeds of the mid-to-late 1950s.

Here we have a mixture of both, with reds in the 5TV and yellows

The sparkle and touch response makes you want to ditch pedals and get straight onto the grid

Both of these amplfiers are inspired by Fender's classic 'TV front' circuits. The 5A3 Deluxe and 5A2 Princeton were first manufactured in 1948 and although neither circuit has complex controls, Rift's tribute models are capable of a wide range of clean and dirty textures. Our favourite tones from the 15TV (top) are achieved by cranking up the tone control and plugging into input one on the 'bright' channel

The Tweed 15TV comes with a Warehouse G12Q ceramic 12-inch speaker as standard. The Black & Blue alnico is an extra £185 but has a much bigger voice that has much in common with a Celestion Blue. The G12Q has plenty of compression but offers a tighter bass response, less early-onset feedback and a slighty more primitive, retro vibe all round. It's much less efficient than the alnico unit, too, so if you need to keep volume levels down then it's well worth considering

in the 15TV. Both circuits are built on traditional eyelet board, with moisture resistant phenolic resin substrate rather than vulcanised fibreboard. For consistency and lower noise, carbon film resistors are preferred to vintage-spec carbon composites.

The rectifier and power valves will be familiar to most of us. What really sets earlier style tweeds apart from those that followed are the large octal tubes in the preamp that Fender used before migrating to the more familiar nine-pin 12AY7 and 12AX7 valves.

Since both of these amps were originally built with octal preamp valves, Chris has opted for Tung-Sol-branded 6SL7 double triodes – grid leak biased in the first stage and cathode biased in the second stage. Octal preamp valves can often be microphonic, so they've been fitted with heat-resistant rubber rings. In our experience, these are very effective at dampening down mechanically induced noises.

In Use

It's worth bearing in mind that Fender developed the circuits replicated in these Rift amps back when swamp ash bodies, maple boards and low-wound pickups ruled the roost. So 50s-style Fenders that might be rather glassy with later amp designs sound particularly well-balanced and full-bodied through grid leak biased octal tubes.

The 5TV isn't especially loud, bright or versatile. It has a boxy, raw-edged tone that you don't get from most low-power amps. The eight-inch speaker limits low-end and the circuit restricts the highs, resulting in a strong midrange emphasis.

There's a darkness to the sound, so for most applications, the tone control is best set fairly high. Take time to listen to the way it works because there's a fairly narrow sweet spot. Balance it with the volume control and you're rewarded with a warm, clear, old-school tone that suits jump blues and hollowbody Travis picking.

Although it's always tempting to set the controls to stun with low-wattage valve amps, that approach doesn't reveal the best of the 5TV. In contrast to the 15TV, which seems to keep getting better as it gets louder, the 5TV eases into a slightly fizzy and papery rasp rather than creamy overdrive.

It's reminiscent of a primitive fuzz tone, maybe with slightly starved transistors – a very cool retro tone. It's not necessarily the kind of sound you'd use all the time, but the lo-fi rasp is a dead ringer for the 5A2 Princeton that inspired Fantana to build his own version.

At jam sessions, it can be hard to hear yourself clearly if you're using the 5TV with another guitar player or dense-sounding backing tracks. We are more enamoured of it as a recording amp on those occasions when a 'special effect' is required, or for low-wattage retro tones when playing unaccompanied.

Does the Rift Tweed 15TV actually sounds like a vintage 5A3? With the thick and chewy midrange, sweet but clear treble and creamy breakup all present and correct, it does bear a very strong resemblance. There is a minor difference in the low mids, where the 15TV has a bit more girth. This fattens the tone somewhat, but it loses some of the evenness of frequency spread that we get from our 5A3 loaded with a Celestion Blue.

> The Rift 15TV does bear a very strong sonic resemblance to a vintage Fender 5A3

Swapping speakers does level the playing field and further demonstrates how close the 15TV is to the original. It doesn't quite match the vintage 5A3's airy harmonic sheen and the overdrive texture is a tad grainier, but we're really splitting hairs now, because most of the essentials are there.

Checking the speaker specs we notice that the Warehouse Black & Blue alnico has a resonance frequency of 107Hz – somewhat higher than the Blue's 75Hz. So this may well explain the lower-mid bump. Since the Warehouse Black & Blue is Rift's upgrade option, we audition the standard Warehouse G12Q ceramic, too.

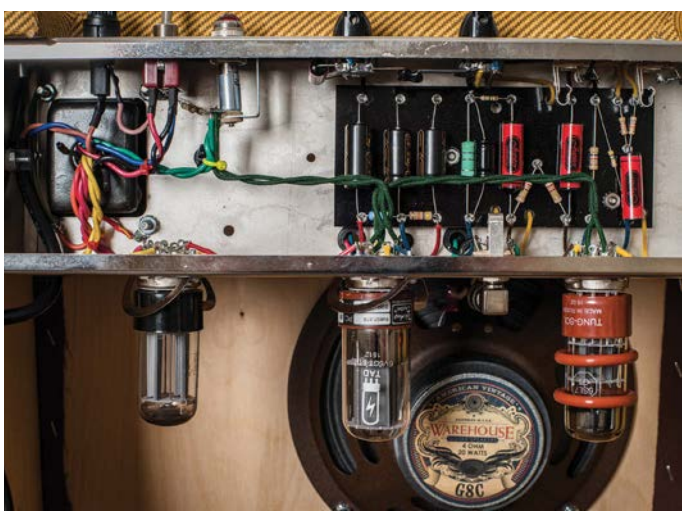
With it's lower 92Hz resonance frequency, the G12Q immediately lessens the 15TVs low-mid thump. With semis this helps you to crank the volume up a little more before the onset of feedback, but you may miss the bolstering effect of the Black & Blue with single coil solidbodies. We hear a bit more midrange bark and compression with the ceramic, along with a slightly rougher, retro rock 'n' roll quality; compared to both alnicos, it's throatier and there's less overall volume on tap.

Each 12-inch speaker provides a variation on the theme of harmonic richness, woody and chiming cleans, and overdrive that approaches a 5E3 for sheer heaviness and sustain but never strays into edginess or harshness. It's certainly a 'vintage'-toned amp, so you can get country cleans, a touch of grit for rockabilly, or all-out Chicago blues meltdown.

Even if you don't play in those styles, the 15TV is an amp that simply delivers great tone. It has a fuller and richer midrange than most circuits can manage, combined with a dark sparkle and the sort of player friendly touch response that will make you want to ditch those pedals and get straight onto the grid.

Unlike later tweeds, where the extended treble ensures that input selection is a meaningful choice, we find ourselves using the 15TV's number one input on the 'bright' channel exclusively for maximum brightness and sensitivity. On the 5TV the inputs are configured more as a mixer than high and low, although one has a subtle treble roll off. Again we go for the brightest option.

Early tweed circuits have a sonic signature that won't suit every guitar player. By so closely replicating those characteristics the same can be said about Rift's Tweed 5TV and 15TV, but this is a compliment rather than a criticism. If you prefer a different speaker brand then it can be changed later or factored into the purchase price, but where it really matters Chris Fantana does it right, and these amps offer authentic vintage tone and high build quality at extremely competitive prices.



KEY FEATURES

Rift Amplification 5TV

- **PRICE** £1,059 (as reviewed)
- **DESCRIPTION** Cathode-biased valve combo. Made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 5W
- **VALVES** 1x 6SL7, 1x 6V6, 1x 5Y3
- **CONTROL PANEL** Volume, tone, power
- **SPEAKER** 1x8 Warehouse Guitar Speakers G8C
- **DIMENSIONS** 410x440x225mm
- **WEIGHT** 9.8kg/21.6lbs
- **OPTIONS** 1x10 (+£30) or 1x12 (larger cabinet, +£54) speakers, relic'd tweed (+£40), Jupiter Red 'Astron'-style capacitors (+£20)
- **CONTACT** Rift Amplification 07480 067871 **www.riftamps.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Easy overdrive and distortion
+ Sweet midrange
+ Bags of small box vintage character
+ Very portable

- Slightly dark tone
- Can struggle for clarity

The 5TV replicates the tone and response of an early 1950s Princeton with all of the character and idiosyncrasies of an original

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Rift Amplification 15TV

- **PRICE** £1,514 (as reviewed)
- **DESCRIPTION** Cathode-biased valve combo. Made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 15W
- **VALVES** 2x 6SL7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5Y3
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input jacks, volume, volume tone, power
- **SPEAKER** 1x 12-inch Warehouse Guitar Speakers Black & Blue alnico
- **DIMENSIONS** 420 x 455 x 120mm
- **WEIGHT** 12.3kg/27.1lbs
- **OPTIONS** Base model with Warehouse G12Q is £1,329. Relic'd tweed (+£40), Jupiter Red 'Astron' style capacitors (+£50)

Guitar Class AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Fat and chewy midrange and sweet treble
+ Smooth breakup
+ Superb touch dynamics
+ Small, light and loud

- Slightly more hiss than a vintage 5A3

The chassis and cabinet may be slightly different, but the 15TV is in all other respects a highly convincing, killer-sounding 5A3 Deluxe replica

9/10

Auden Julia

The Julia is Auden's latest small-bodied electro, designed for songwriters. **JAMES STEVENS** investigates...

Auden (pronounced ore-don) are, comparatively speaking, new kids on the acoustic guitar block, but in a short space of time this UK-based company has built a range of guitars that have received widespread acclaim and commendation. Doug Sparkes, the man behind the brand, has assembled a small (dream) team of skilled luthiers from around the world who, in turn, hand-build guitars with materials from FSC-approved suppliers. All Auden guitars also come fitted with award-winning Swiss-made Schertler electronics that have long been something of a well-kept secret among acoustic players.

In what is an indication of the company's confidence in their construction techniques and quality control standards, every person who purchases a new Auden is invited to visit the Northampton-based workshop to see the final set-up process, and have the guitar adjusted to the customer's specific requirements.

Auden also underlines the company's green credentials by donating the cost of one tree for every guitar sold to the Trees for Cities initiative.

Our review model comes in a good-quality, Auden-branded, three clasp (one lockable) hard-shell case, the internal compartment of which holds a transparent pickguard should you wish to retro-fit one, an Allen key for truss-rod adjustments, spare compensated bridge, and a branded polishing cloth. It would be fair to say the Julia is loosely based on Martin's 00 model; the overall body length being 18.88 inches on both models. However, the Auden is a smidgen narrower across both the upper and lower bouts, and the body depth is marginally shallower – all of which makes the Julia a very comfortable guitar to play, either seated or strapped on and standing.

The Julia's AAA-grade cedar book-matched top is a fine selection, showing an almost ruler-straight, tight grain finished in a flawless three-tone tobacco sunburst. The two-piece back and sides are high-quality African mahogany, as is the low-profile neck. Both the top and back of the Julia is fitted with maple binding, and the same material is used for the soundhole rosette, heel cap and neck binding, while the fingerboard and bridge pins are ebony. We particularly like the selection of ebony used for the fingerboard. It's a common misconception that ebony is a jet-black coloured wood. It's not, and the natural shades and hues here give the feeling of a well-worn fingerboard – a feature we like!

While the choice of tonewoods here is pretty commonplace, the overall appearance is most definitely greater than the sum of its parts – the Julia is no plain Jane. The contrasting shades of the respective woods create an air of style and class. We love the simplicity of the single slice of maple for the rosette. Perhaps other designers would have been tempted to split the ring into two or three different inlays, but the humble, single band used here is very 'less is more'. It also serves to draw attention to the sleek lines and contours.

> The contrasting shades of the respective woods create an air of style and class

KEY FEATURES

Auden Julia

- **PRICE** £999 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Small-bodied electro-acoustic. Made in China with final assembly in the UK
- **BUILD** Tobacco sunburst AAA Cedar top, African mahogany back, neck and sides, ebony fingerboard, and maple binding – all held together with hide glue
- **HARDWARE** Schertler open-gear
- **ELECTRICS** Schertler Lydia
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.6"/625mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 56mm at 14th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at nut, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 58mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.73kg/3.81lbs
- **FINISH** 3-tone sunburst, all-satin
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (to order)
- **CONTACT** Auden Guitars 01933 391234 **www.audenguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Faith FNCEMG** (**£899**) is an all-mahogany, satin-finished, electro that was voted the UK's best acoustic guitar in 2014, and comes fitted with a Shadow Performer preamp. The **Tanglewood TW45 VS E** (**£829**) is a small-bodied, cedar-over-mahogany electro that features a vintage sunburst finish and the Fishman Presys+ pickup. If the budget will stretch a little further, **Martin's** new **000-15M StreetMaster** (**£1,499**) is an all-mahogany guitar that features a 'worn satin' finish for that bluesy, distressed look

When finishing the body, Auden has chosen to leave the back and sides open-pore. On the vast majority of guitars, prior to spray finishing, the untreated wood is 'smeared' with filler that in-fills the wood's natural pores. It's then sanded back and finished. An open-pore finish omits this filling stage, heading straight to the spray shop instead, leaving an 'orange peel' type look. This, combined with the ultra-thin satin finish, gives a very 'earthy', tactile feel. It's a general rule of thumb, too, that thinner finishes increase resonance.

Overall, the build quality of this Auden is excellent. An inspection of the inside of the body reveals no evidence of sloppy quality control – far from it. There are no tell-tale signs of excess glue, tiny splinters or wood shavings anywhere. As far as we could find, all joints are clean and tight, and the 20 medium frets are immaculately finished. In respect to its finish and presentation, this Julia is as good as you'll find on guitars twice the price.

As with all Audens, the Julia comes loaded with onboard electronics in the form of the Schertler Lydia. This system includes an under-saddle transducer and a Class A internal amp. Three rotary controls are fitted just inside the soundhole; volume on the bass side, treble and bass on the treble side. Soundhole rotaries aren't everyone's choice as it can be tricky to make adjustments mid-song, but if you're the sort of person who finds a sound and then leaves the controls alone, you'll have no issues.

In Use

In terms of its acoustic performance, the Julia lives up to the high expectations set by its build quality and presentation. With a medium pick in hand, open position chords release a dry, woody tone full of mids and presence. Single-note runs and riffs (made easier thanks to the super-slick neck finish) offer clear and precise high notes, while the lower end of the register is thick and deeply resonant. If you had to choose one word to describe the overall timbre, you'd probably pick 'bluesy'. To that end, we'd suggest that fitting a set of Monel strings would transport you back to a smoke-filled blues club in the 1930s!

Plugging the Julia into our house Schertler David amp with the controls set flat, gives the onboard package a chance to shine. We found, however, that a degree of tweaking was needed to find a tone to match the Julia's acoustic output. While the Lydia's rotaries certainly control a wide spectrum of sounds, we'd suggest caution as too much bass induces feedback, and too much treble gives a brittle, harsh snap. The most favourable tone came from rolling around half of the bass off, and almost all of the treble. No doubt different amps and environments will yield different results, but our findings suggest the Julia is not 'plug in and play', more 'plug in and fine tune'. That shouldn't detract, however, from the fact that the Lydia is a powerful and dynamic system.

The overall look and acoustic performance of the Julia will mean it will appeal to many. It certainly has a lot to offer and we'd suggest that, if you're looking for a competent, stylish and retro-feeling electro, you could do a lot worse.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Well-built, well-finished and well thought-out guitar
+ Versatile sound, but excels for bluesy fingerpicking
+ Simple, uncomplicated and stylish looks

- The onboard electrics will take a bit of taming and fine-tuning for best results
- The soundhole-fitted rotary controls can be fiddly to use

Auden describes this as a 'Bench Guitar', and we can see why. High build standards, quality materials and tonewoods, all beautifully presented. If you can see past the fiddly soundhole rotaries, there's a lot to like here

8/10

MINI MONSTERS

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EarthQuaker Devices Palisades

This take on the most famous overdrive of all adds knobs galore. **RICHARD PURVIS** dares not to be green...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

Palisades

- **PRICE** £245
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual overdrive and boost pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Rotary switches for voice and bandwidth; boost, volume, tone, gain A, gain B; normal/bright and buffer on/off switches; bypass, gain B and boost footswitches
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 144x125x59mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 6574 8228
  earthquakerdevices.com
  audiodistributiongroup.com

Unless you've just made the switch from *The Bassoon Magazine*, you'll know that the Tube Screamer was originally designed and built by Maxon for Ibanez in the late 1970s, and the original TS-808 was a fairly low-gain overdrive with a light bottom end and a strong boost to the upper mids. Many other versions have followed, but the basic idea of the mid-humped crunch box has remained a staple for everyone from SRV to The Edge.

EarthQuaker decided to make its entry into this market with a bit of a statement... and that statement is five knobs, two rotary switches, two toggles and three footswitches. Don't they know Screamers aren't supposed to be versatile?!

The rotary switches are the really interesting part of the Palisades. The one on the left changes the clipping diodes in the circuit, while the one on the right offers five different levels of bass cut – the one part of the traditional TS sound that many players wish they could control more. Those extra footswitches engage a higher-gain channel and a clean boost, while the two toggle switches allow you to add extra sparkle or engage an input buffer for a tighter, feistier tone.

In Use

Hang on... the TS clips symmetrically, right? Well, the Palisades' six voices are listed as: no diodes, LED, MOSFET, asymmetrical silicon, symmetrical silicon and Schottky diode – and voice four (asymmetrical) is billed as the closest to the classic TS-808. Heresy?

Well, actually not – with gain low and bandwidth at full, it sounds much greener than it looks: smooth and crunchy, with enough of that famous 'hump' to cut through without getting harsh. The top end chimes sweetly, and there's no bass drop-off at all.

> This box could replace three others, and we wonder if there's anything it can't do?

The effect of switching through the voices isn't overly dramatic, but you can feel the character of the distortion shifting, from hard and snappy to soft and fuzzy. The low end gets steadily thinner as you move down through the bandwidth settings, but even in the super-skinny zone there are usable sounds to be uncovered.

Gain B can be set for a whopping lift in overdrive without affecting the output level, while the booster does a fine job of making the whole thing louder – or more gainy if your amp's just breaking up. This box could replace three others, and we wonder if there's anything it can't do?

Well, there is one thing. In a shootout with a Maxon OD-808, the Palisades is a better all-rounder, but it can't quite deliver the same softly compressed attack that makes the real thing feel so fluid and addictive. You can be a Tube Screamer, or you can be more than a Tube Screamer, but maybe you can't be both.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **LunaStone Three Stage Rocket** (**£269**) also has two channels of TS-style gain plus boost, while the **Way Huge Green Rhino MkIV** (**£147**) offers some very handy EQ-shaping options. Finally, the **Ibanez TS-808DX** (**£199**) is as flexible as official Tube Screamers get

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Beautifully natural overdrive with unique levels of tone-tweaking
+ Versatility of extra footswitches
- It's not really a 'proper' Screamer
- Clean boost doesn't work on its own

A superb-sounding TS-type with huge versatility, but it's not for purists

9/10

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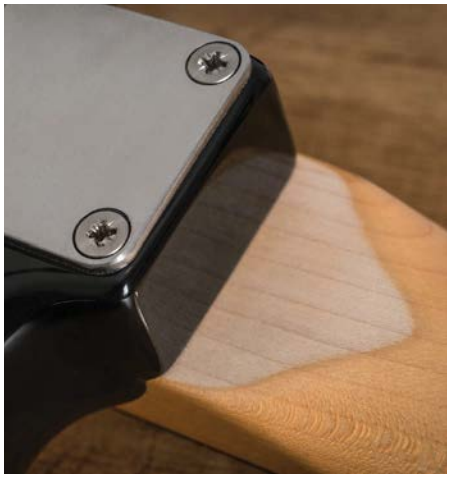

Wudtone Vintage Reload Program

Wudtone now offers a fitting, fretting and setup service on top of its excellent retrofit Stratocaster vibrato systems. **HUW PRICE** gets with the program...

KEY FEATURES

Wudtone Vintage Reload Program

- **PRICE** £290 (Vintage 50s hardware)
- **DESCRIPTION** Bespoke Stratocaster upgrade package and retrofit vibrato bridge. Made in the UK
- **OPTIONS** Holy Grail hardware (£315)
- **CONTACT** Wudtone 07733 264984 **www.wudtone.com**

Drawing on his professional background, Andy Preston's approach to Strat mods is practically a reimagining from an engineering perspective. We reviewed Wudtone's aftermarket vibrato bridges last year, but now both models are included in an upgrade package called the Vintage Reload Program.

The Program comprises 11 stages of tweaking and includes setup and maintenance procedures combined with hardware upgrades, and promises a transformative effect on playability and acoustic tone.

Firstly, the frets are levelled and polished, but unusually the levelling is done with the neck under tension – so the strings remain on the guitar. Rosewood fingerboards are then oiled and attention turns to the trem.

Rather than sandwiching the Wudtone 'whacker plate' between the bridge and the body, the finish underneath is precision-routed to expose bare wood and allow the plate's top surface to be level with the paintwork. The wood is then sealed and the Wudtone bridge of your choice is fitted.

The neck pocket screw holes are widened to accommodate Wudtone's longer and thicker screws, and pilot holes are drilled into the neck. Before the neck is re-fitted, the finish is removed from the heel and Wudtone's cutlery-grade stainless steel Power Plate replaces the original neck plate.

With new strings fitted, a bone nut is installed and the neck relief, intonation and action are set. For this review, we're comparing two Wudtone-modded Mexican Strats (one with Andy's Vintage 50s trem, the other with a Holy Grail) with a stock Fender.

> The modded guitars feel like they're in a different league – they're extremely easy to play

In Use

Our stock model is a Mexican-made Standard Strat with 0.009s fitted, while the others are Classic Series 60s Strats with 0.010s. It's not quite a level playing field but the contrast is remarkable. Both modded guitars feel like they're in a different league. The 'boards are super smooth and the frets offer no resistance to string bends. They're extremely easy to play and are free of fretbuzz and choke out. The neck joints are so solid they almost feel glued in.

The tonal improvement is equally marked. Both Wudtone vibratos provide improvements in clarity, note separation and harmonic complexity, along with a massive increase in sustain. However, there are differences between the individual Wudtone bridges themselves, with the Vintage 50s unit having a more open, springy quality and a scooped midrange.

In contrast the Holy Grail has extra brightness, clearer string-separation and a midrange that bolsters the unwound strings, but it's less warm. Both feel ultra smooth and precise, while tuning is remarkably stable.

In effect, you're paying £150 on top of the cost of the trem for it to be fitted, have your frets expertly levelled and polished, get a bone nut fitted, have the neck joint improved and have a pro setup with strings thrown in. We'd call that a bargain.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Probably the finest aftermarket Strat trems available
+ Rock-solid tuning
+ Vastly improved playability and tone
+ Great value for money
+ Fits every type of Stratocaster

– Absolutely nothing

This package greatly improves tone, stabilises tuning and makes a mid-priced Strat play and sound like a professional-grade instrument

10/10

Honeyboy AMPS

Get glorious retro guitar tone through a beautifully handcrafted amplifier

www.honeyboyamps.com

"Fabulous – reminds me of vintage 40s Gibson amps in terms of quality of tone. I always look forward to playing through it."
Chris Corcoran

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ALL STRATS HAVE THE BASIC INGREDIENTS TO BE TRULY GREAT. THE WUDTONE VINTAGE RELOAD PROVIDES THE RIGHT HARDWARE & SET UP TO CREATE A TRULY CLASSIC STRAT SOUND WITH TOTAL TUNING STABILITY.

"I have to say as a Vintage Strat guy, these guitars are exceptional. I was hoping the reload program would enable me to get the same sounds as my original 61 & 63 Strats have. I was so blown away by the first Strat, I ordered a second Candy Apple one!"

Mark Boughton, lead guitarist
Lorise Eton & the Stealers

"The difference in tone, length of note, and feel was unmistakeable. The bridge undoubtedly had more effect on the guitar than the new pickups"

Fitzy, The Maddie Jones Band

Guitar & Bass AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

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MODERN CLASSICS

Paul Connop's taste for designs from the electric guitar's golden era has seen him assemble a highly desirable array of six-strings that have seen plenty of use in the studio and on the road. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** gets the skinny...

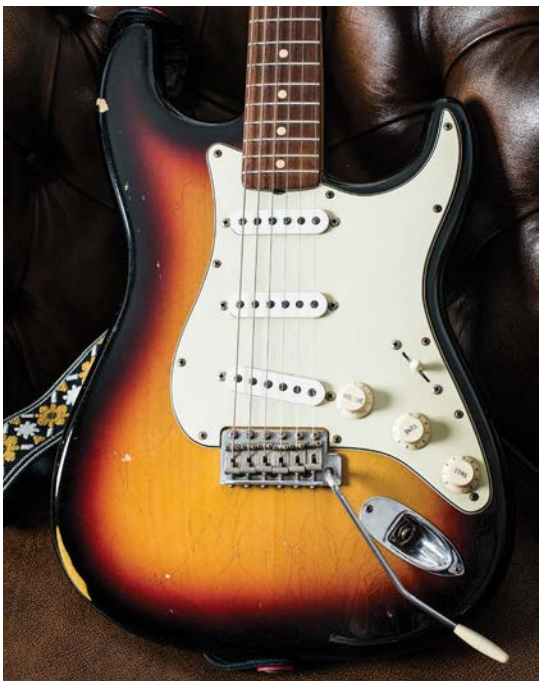
Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Princeton
Reverb-Amp
FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
SPEED
INTENSITY
CUSTOM MADE

Based in a picturesque corner of Shropshire, guitarist Paul Connop is responsible for toneful, ethereal electric guitar atmospherics as part the live backing band for Ivor Novello Award-winning Black Country singer-songwriter Scott Matthews. Paul's collection – Telecasters, Gibson semis, Juniors – was recently given an airing on a string of UK and European tour dates with Matthews and it betrays a love of classic gear that's as tasteful as his playing, while a pedalboard bristling with Strymon units is a nod to convenience and modernity.

Like so many of us – this writer included – Paul's pathway into the wonderland of the six-string guitar began with classical lessons and a nylon-string before the siren song of rock 'n' roll came calling. "I was probably eight, nine, something like that," he remembers. "I was into bands like Quo and stuff like that, I guess I'd seen people playing guitar and thought,

Opposite page **Paul's Gibson Memphis 1964 ES-345 features an aged Bigsby B7 from Electric Mojo Guitars in Quebec. "I always wanted a Cherry 335, 345 or 355," he says. "I'm a massive Noel fan. For a while I had one of those Chinese Höfner Verithins which was great, but when I could afford it I got a Gibson."**
Above left **Gibson Memphis 1959 ES-345**
Left **Gibson Custom 1963 ES-335 limited edition with P-90s**
Above **Gibson Custom '61 VOS SG Maestro circa 2000 with Martin Six String Customs loom and double-ring tuners**



Top left **Fender 2007 '50s Road Worn Telecaster**
Top right **Fender American Vintage 1952 Hot Rod Tele**
Bottom left **Fender Custom Shop 1960 Stratocaster Relic: "As soon as I picked it up it felt like I'd been playing it for 20 years."**
Bottom right **Fender Japan 1962 Custom Telecaster with Mojo PAF neck pickup**

that could be for me! But my parents were keen for me to do it properly and get some lessons."

Classical GAS

"There was a lady who lived not far from where I lived who was a piano and guitar teacher, so I went to her for a few years and did the whole classical thing and the grades. Then Angus Young came along and everything changed! Then it was like, I don't really want this guitar anymore, but I really want one that looks like Angus's. So I got a Kay SG replica with single-coils, a trem and a batwing 'guard.

"It was probably from that point that the lessons started to fade away," he laughs. "I got a small practice amp and learnt from records but I'm eternally grateful to my parents for making me do the lesson thing. For what I do now with Scott, the fingerpicking – having that early tuition, I'm grateful for it now. When I'm at

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Above **Fender Custom Shop 1963 Double TV Jones Tele with Bigsby vibrato and Mustang bridge saddles. Paul's guitar straps are hand-made by Souldier in Chicago**

home I never play with a pick. Maybe that comes from starting that way."

Once bitten by the electric guitar bug, Paul was hooked: "Then begins a lifelong obsession and always thinking about the next guitar! I grew up on AC/DC and Sabbath and Purple, Rainbow and Whitesnake and all those bands. So it was about saving what you could to get to that next, best guitar. And I went through the whole pointy phase with the Charvels and the Jacksons. From early teens I was in bands, just mates at school, as soon as there was enough of us to put a band together and get in a room or somebody's shed or a classroom after school."

Worth Their Salt

These days, along with backing Scott Matthews and session recording work, Paul also plays with Neal Cook – once the frontman of Wolverhampton post-punks

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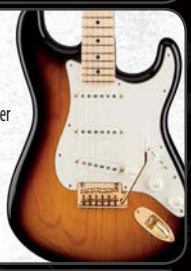

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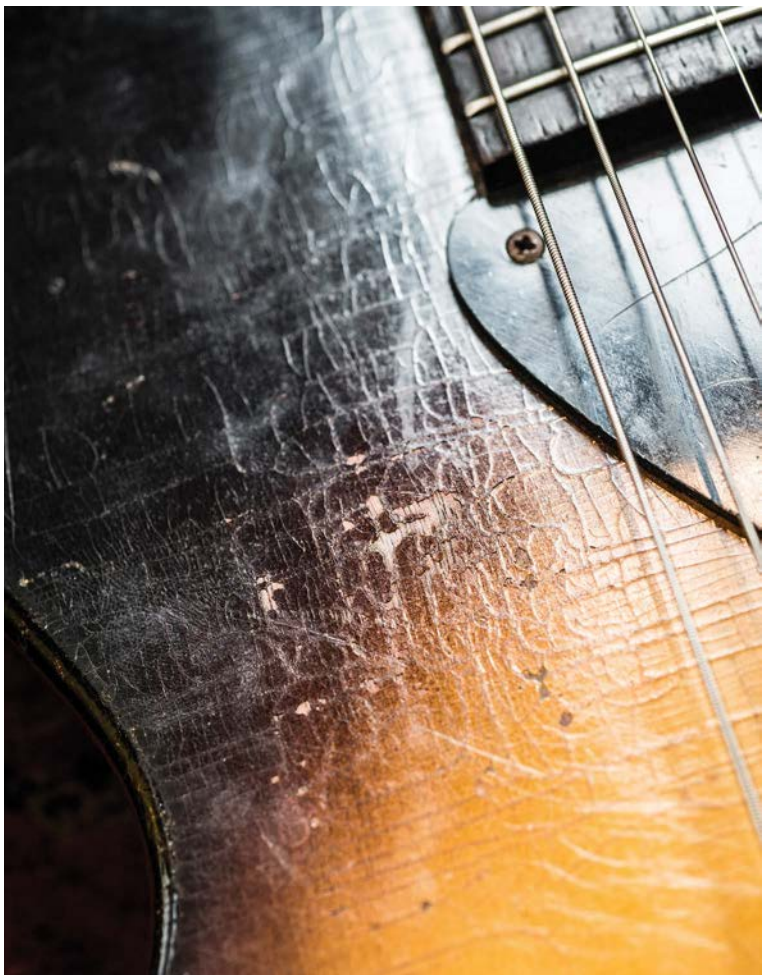

A TALE OF TWO JUNIORS

Five decades separate this pair of stripped-down tone machines

Paul owns two sunburst Les Paul Juniors: a 2007 Gibson Custom '57 VOS and an original 1950s model. "My friend Neil had a Junior and I really liked everything about it," he remembers. "The neck, the weight, everything. Then this VOS model came up. I fell in love with the massive neck; in fact the Custom Shop one is even bigger than the vintage one, they've kind of over-egged it. I've put MojoAxe compensated tailpieces on both of them, they are just great. It's not the easiest thing in the world to intonate and I find it really helps. But you've got so little to work with it makes you work a bit harder. I really fell in love with it."

The love affair soon blossomed and when an affordable vintage Junior became available, he jumped at the chance to own one: "The old one was sold to me as a '57. It has had a neck break, which meant I was able to afford it! I did a part trade for a '98 Firebird, which was great but a bit of an unwieldy beast. When you buy one of these, the more you read into it, you start looking at other '57s... I'm not sure it's a '57 because the tailpiece is so close to the P-90. It may be a '56. I'm not 100 per cent sure but in all honesty I don't really care!

"As far as I'm aware it's all stock apart from the tailpiece that I've changed, and when the neck was broken I'm pretty sure the headstock was resprayed. It hasn't got original decals. It doesn't bother me that much. It doesn't change the way it plays or sounds. It's got a lot of charm. It did have repro tuners on but I've changed them for a set for Fake 58s. They are good, it feels pretty solid and holds its tune. When you play both guitars side by side they have got their own characteristics. In some ways I think the VOS one is a little brighter, maybe. Feel-wise, they are pretty close but the reissue's neck is bigger. It's lovely just to sit and noodle on, it's a super-comfy guitar."

Above **Although Paul's vintage Junior is a favourite for home noodling, his Bigsby-loaded Fender Japan Tele has become a go-to guitar for live work**

The Wild Flowers – in Americana outfit Saltflat. It's his second stint with the band.

"Saltflat are a band I met about 10 years ago and started playing with them," he recalls. "It's Americana with that Petty, Wilco vibe. I played with them for a few years and for whatever reason went on to do something else and play with other bands.

"We stayed friends and we just got chatting and now we've almost drawn a line under it and said, let's not do anything we did 10 years ago, so we started writing some stuff again so we've been doing that on and off recently. We were supposed to be playing the Y Not festival last weekend but it was a wash-out, it was like a warzone out there. The whole site was like gravy!"

Still Searching

Although his collection contains some lovely Custom Shop instruments and ticks most of the classic tonal

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ROAD WARRIORS

Hot glass and boutique stompboxes are central to Paul's rig

Paul's main live and studio amplifiers offer Blackface and tweed flavours. His limited edition Fender '65 Princeton Reverb 'Fudge Brownie' is loaded with a Jensen P10Q alnico speaker, while his Lazy J 20 combo and extension cabinet feature Celestion Alnico Blue 12-inch speakers. The Lazy J 20 is fully loaded with a Variable Attenuation Control, valve tremolo and reverb.

For shows with Scott Matthews, the Princeton tends to be Paul's main stage amp along with the Lazy J extension cab, "Because of the delicacy of Scott's music. The Lazy J 20 can be a little feisty and the Princeton is less likely to roar! There's lots of textural, reverb-drenched stuff with Ebows and slides going on. For me there always seems to be a bit more clarity with the Princeton. But if I'm just plugging into an amp on its own I just love the Lazy J. From the first time I played one, nothing else ever sounded the same. Jesse [Hoff, Lazy J head honcho] is such a lovely guy."

The aforementioned widescreen textures are created using an enviably well-stocked pedalboard. Paul describes the Strymon BigSky and TimeLine as "a world of fun", while the Origin Cali76, Strymon Deco and RYRA Klone tend to remain switched on. They add an appealing sheen and it "feels like there's something missing" when they are disengaged.

boxes, he's not done collecting just yet. "I feel very lucky that I've got what I've got," he says. "There's not a lot of vintage stuff. Like all of us I guess I'd love to own lots of nice vintage pieces. As a collector it would be lovely to have a room full of that, no doubt, but I still feel very lucky to have found the ones I've found along the way. Custom Shop guitars are great guitars."

We sense a 'but' on the horizon. What's next on the list? "I don't know why I've never bought one but I'd really love a Ricky. They're an acquired taste and I've played different ones over the years... some feel great and some feel very odd. A friend of mine has a 625 – the *Damn The Torpedoes*, classic Tom Petty Fireglo model – and it's great. The neck's quite chunky and it sounds great. Put it into a Fender amp and it sounds gorgeous. I would love a Ricky, and if I was going to buy one I'd buy a 12-string because I haven't got one. It would be nice to have it as a different colour and texture."

And like all of us, Paul's wishlist doesn't end there: "At some point I'd love an old non-reverse Firebird but they are so much money. A real '54 Goldtop would be the dream, but that's a real lottery win guitar, I'm afraid..." Ain't that the truth.

Check out Paul's new website at www.paulconnop.com

Clockwise from top left **Kimbara nylon-string (Paul's first guitar), Gibson J-45 True Vintage, Fender Thinline nylon-string, 1957 Melodija archtop**

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Classic Combinations

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Manufactured by Valco, the Gretsch 6161 Electromatic amplifier's tweed covering and TV-style front couldn't be more 50s, and its pair of elliptical speakers are very much of the era, too.

To see a treasure trove of vintage gear including this pair of Gretsches and much more, simply visit Old Hat Guitars and make a donation to Cancer Research. Owner Norman Mitchell will then show you around the museum that resides above the shop. "If it's a substantial contribution or I like 'em, they can play anything!", he says. You can't say fairer than that...

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ECC83-S	**20 Pcs**	**£7.20 Each**	**6L6GC**	**16 Pcs**	**£13.20 Each**
ECC83-S	**40 Pcs**	**£6.90 Each**	**6V6GTS**	**16 Pcs**	**£12.00 Each**
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Vintage TIME MACHINES

'65 FENDER JAGUAR

Fender's short-scale offset was marketed to set surf guitarist's pulses racing, but it ended up being a vehicle for much more noisy pursuits...

Offset guitars have enjoyed a resurgence in the past decade thanks to the popularity of indie-rock bands who eschew the more classic body shapes. While this trend has brought about a surge in modern boutique instruments in that style, it's hard to beat the originals: the Fender Jazzmaster and Jaguar.

Originally released in 1962, the top-of-the-line Jaguar deviated from the Jazzmaster blueprint of 1958 in a number of ways. This included a shorter scale length at 24 inches (compared to the Jazzmaster's 25.5) and shielded single-coil pickups instead of the Jazzmaster's feedback-prone units.

The Jaguar was supposed to appeal to guitarists in the emergent surf genre, so beachside themes dominated early adverts, and ultimately a Jaguar did make its way into the hands of Carl Wilson of the Beach Boys. But even endorsement from the most biggest surf-pop band of the day couldn't propel the Jaguar to match the popularity of the Strat or Telecaster. After just 13 years in production, the Jaguar was axed from the Fender catalogue altogether in late 1975, never having really found its audience during its original run.

But that's not the end of the story – the Jaguar experienced a resurgence in the early 1990s thanks to Kurt Cobain and other grunge and indie-rock guitarists would soon follow. Off the back of this surge of interest, Fender began production of Japanese-made reissues, and then in 1999 started building the Jaguar in the USA again as part of its American Vintage series. Fender would go on to release a number of vintage-styled reissues and modern iterations of the Jaguar over the years, including a dual-humbucker version and even a semi-hollow.

This beautiful model falls into the most desirable 1962 to 1965 time period

Like many Fenders, the most desirable vintage Jaguars are from before Fender was bought by CBS in 1965. The beautiful model pictured just falls into that 1962 to 1965 time period, and comes in the classic three-tone sunburst, albeit slightly faded, and it's a great option for someone looking to own an orignal piece of Fender offset history.

VITAL STATISTICS

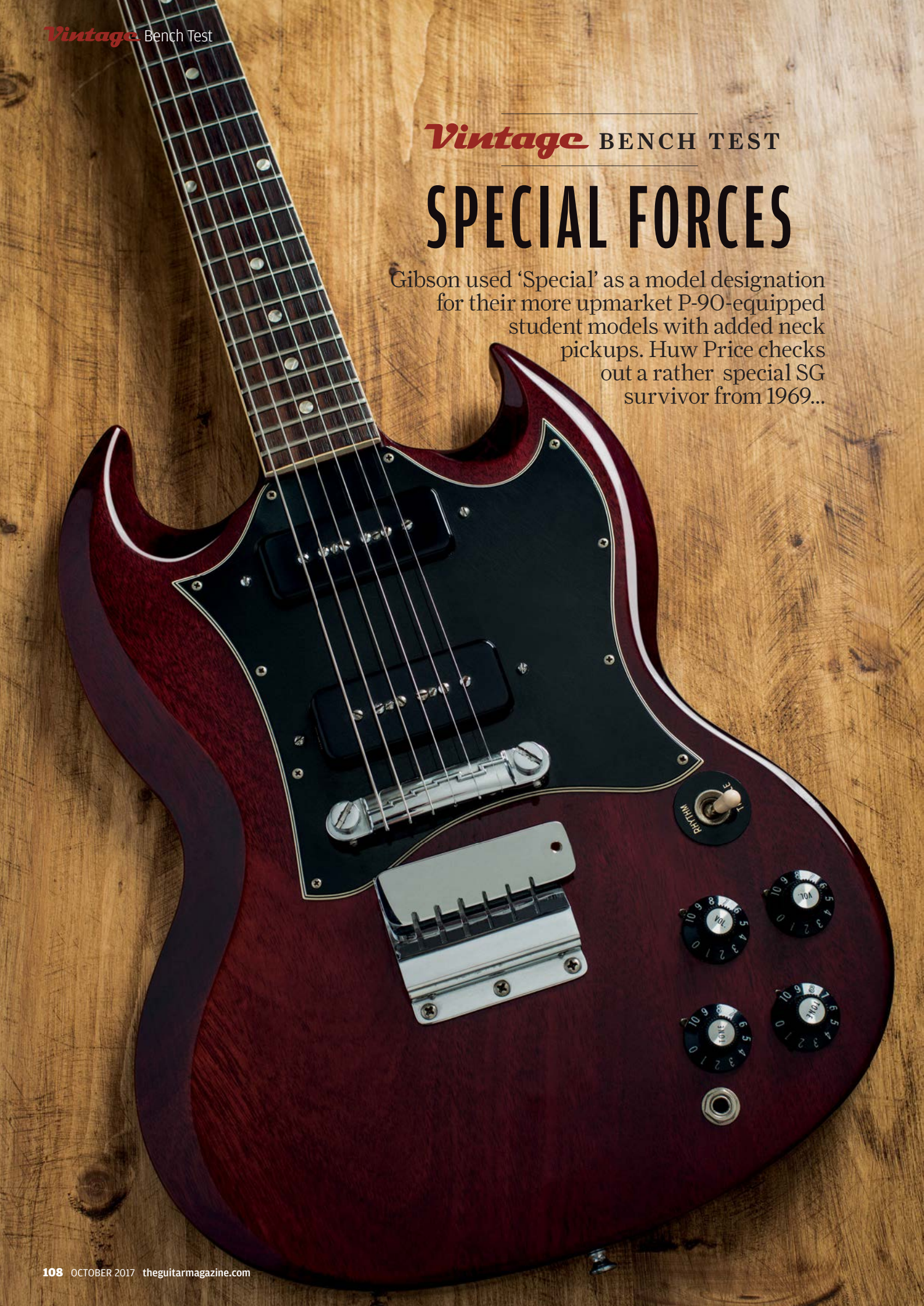
1965 Fender Jaguar

- **PRICE:** £3,050
- **MANUFACTURER:** Fender
- **TYPE:** Solid offset-body electric
- **REVERB SELLER:** Vintage 'N' Rare Guitars reverb.com/shop/vintage-n-rare-guitars-ltd
- **SEE MORE:** reverb.com/item/5898115-fender-jaguar-1965-3-tone-sunburst

Vintage BENCH TEST

SPECIAL FORCES

Gibson used 'Special' as a model designation for their more upmarket P-90-equipped student models with added neck pickups. Huw Price checks out a rather special SG survivor from 1969...



With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, most now regard 1950s Goldtops, Juniors, Specials, Standards and Customs as some of the greatest solidbody guitars ever made. Even so, Fender was helping itself to a big slice of the guitar pie and there is a clear sense that Gibson felt itself struggling to adapt.

In an attempt to appear less stuffy and conservative, Gibson went from the sublime to the outlandish, and in 1958 shocked the guitar world with the Flying V and Explorer models. Neither proved successful commercially, so after a brief pause Gibson tried again and the body shape we now associate with the SG made its debut in 1961.

Gibson began using the SG designation in 1960, and the SG Special of that year was essentially identical to the double-cutaway 1959 Les Paul Special. However from 1961 SG models were very different, with 19th fret body joints and a far thinner double-cutaway body with extensive edge contouring and pointy horns.

The Junior, Special, Standard and Custom models all acquired the new look and for a while the Les Paul name was retained. However Les himself didn't take to the new design because he felt it lacked sustain and was insufficiently stable structurally. It also bothered him that he would get an unwanted vibrato from the bendy neck, however a certain Pete Townshend would later exploit that characteristic to great effect.

Les Paul was right about the structural issues, but this example has survived almost 50 years unscathed

And it's the Townshend association that inspired owner Craig Wallace to track down this stunning 1969 SG Special. Les Paul was right about the structural issues and as well as the usual headstock breaks, many vintage SGs have suffered breaks at the body joint – something virtually unheard of with the earlier Les Pauls. Fortunately this example has survived almost 50 years virtually unscathed.

Above **The ground wire has traces of the cherry finish on it, indicating that it was installed before the body was sprayed**

Top left **Although low and wide, even the frets are orginal. The fret nibs are mostly intact, too**
Top right **The original three-on-a-plate tuners have been replaced with a set of Schallers**
Bottom **The witch hat knobs are in such good condition that the lettering and numbers are still pristine**
Opposite **Unlike like the SG Standard, the Special had an unadorned headstock, with no model designation on the truss rod cover, and no 'crown' motif – just the Gibson logo, sans dotted 'i', which disappeared from Gibsons in 1968 due to an engineering change**

We don't believe it's had a particularly hard life, because there is hardly any evidence of playwear, and even the guitar's case is in fantastic condition – fusty old guitar odour notwithstanding. With that in mind, it's probably safe to assume this one escaped the attentions of would-be Townshends.

The Brazilian rosewood fingerboard is in excellent condition, along with the factory-fitted nut. Although they are very low and wide, even the frets are original, and the fret nibs are mostly intact. The cherry finish is in outstanding condition and retains most of its hue. We can't find any lacquer checking, and the very few dents and dings are small and superficial. There is some buckle rash, but it's fairly minor and hasn't broken through the finish.

For reasons we can't fully explain, this is probably the best-balanced SG we've ever encountered

Unlike Townshend, Craig prefers to leave the Vibrola tailpiece on his guitar rather than expose the three telltale holes on the front of the body. With the arm removed and stored safely in the case, the guitar is strung up wrapover-style with the original 'stair step' compensated bridge. The bridge and tailpiece are chrome-plated and the original tuners would have been, too. Impressed outlines on the rear of the headstock reveal that Craig's guitar was fitted with the lesser seen and poorly regarded three-on-a-plate open-geared tuners. Instead, Schallers have been added, and they >

Gibson

It's not just the guitar that's clean – the case is in remarkably good nick, too

The control cavity has a brass lining for shielding

provide smooth and stable tuning without adding too much neck heaviness. For reasons we can't fully explain, this is probably the best-balanced SG we've ever encountered.

The original switch tip's thread deteriorated, so it has also been retired to the case, but the guitar retains its original poker chip, scratchplate, knobs and pickup covers. Inside the control cavity all the wiring and solder joints are original and untouched. Ceramic capacitors bridge the CTS pots, which have date codes from the latter half of 1969.

The cavity has a brass lining for shielding with foil backing the cover plate. Cherry lacquer on the ground wire indicates that it was installed prior to spraying and where the sides of the cavity are untouched by lacquer, you can see Gibson's original shade of deep cherry wood stain.

In Use

This must have been one of the last non-volute necks and it's comfortable but still a handful. However it's quite different in feel from a late-50s Gibson profile and more a deep 'U' in shape. SGs can feel rather flimsy sometimes, but thanks to its neck, this example feels quite robust and solid while remaining lightweight and acoustically lively.

It exhibits impressive sustain, precise and clear top end sparkle, and a percussive thump in the bass

This guitar exhibits impressive sustain, precise and clear top end sparkle, and a percussive thump in the bass. It's a tad smoother, woodier and more compressed that the 1957 TV Special we featured last year. In contrast, the '57 Special was brighter, louder and had more harmonic richness in the midrange.

Playing this guitar is almost effort free. The action is so low and the frets so flat that you can whizz around this neck like lightning. It almost goes without saying that upper fret access couldn't be much easier and your fingers might venture into higher altitudes than they are accustomed to. >

KEY FEATURES

1969 Gibson SG Special

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Solid mahogany body, glued-in mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, dot markers and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Schaller tuners (replacements)
- **ELECTRICS** 2x P-90 single-coil pickups, 2x volumes, 2x tones, 3-way selector switch
- **FINISH** Cherry nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 38mm at nut, 50mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.57kg/7.88lbs

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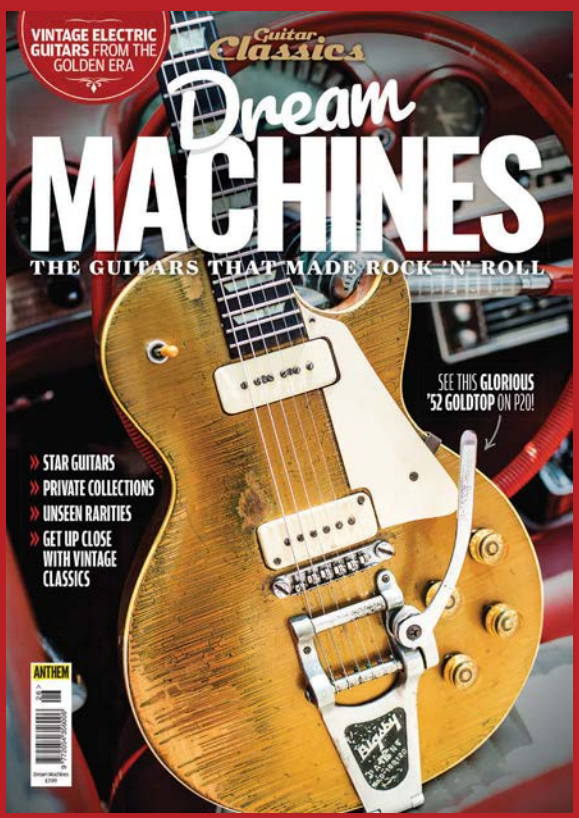

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RHYTHM
TREBLE

Irrespective of the non-50s tone control wiring, these P-90s clean up just as nicely as any 1950s Special or Junior we've played. There is no loss of clarity and it can go from brutal powerchords into a sound not dissimilar to an acoustic tone. Given Townshend's later preference for piezo pickup-equipped bridges on his Strats, it's no wonder that SG Specials were his main stage guitars between 1968 and 1971.

Although the frets are low, we don't experience any difficulties bending strings or adding finger vibrato. It seems the trick is to set the action a little higher above the frets than you usually would so you can get some purchase under the strings. It helps that the set of 0.010s on this guitar feel more like a set of 0.009s.

The controls take some getting used to because it's all too easy to bash the switch when you're adjusting volume and the jack socket location causes access issues with the tone controls unless you use a right-angled plug. Intonation is also a bit of an issue, but only on the G-string. One has to wonder why, when they finally got around to making a compensated wrapover tailpiece, Gibson calibrated it for a wound G.

All things considered, the minor quirkiness enhances the guitar and the tone and playability are every bit as impressive as the condition. It's all about midrange raunch, sweet upper midrange bite and a hint of woody aggression with fast and feather light action. Craig informs us that although he doesn't currently gig with it, this SG Special is his main home guitar and is often taken to band rehearsals. Judging by the condition, we think it might end up seeing more action with him than it did in its first 49 years!

The CTS pots have date codes from the latter half of 1969, and are bridged with ceramic capacitors
Opposite **Although he doesn't use it and strings the guitar up wrapover-style, the guitar's owner still has the Vibrola arm**

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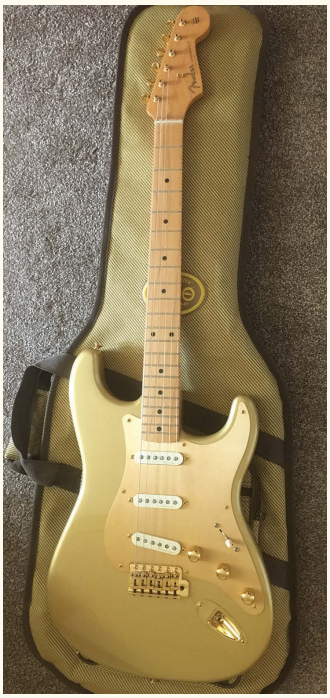

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All about... Picks

Some guitarists get divorced more often than they change their string brand, and though they are just as integral to how we play and sound, plectrums can be much the same. **HUW PRICE** picks a winner...

There was once a time when every guitar magazine interview would conclude with the question, "What picks do you use?" – to the point where it became the definition of the most bland thing a guitar player could be asked. But is it really such silly question to ask?

Most guitarists are pretty serious about tone, and yet the contribution of humble plectrums is seldom considered in the equation. Some great players have eschewed the pick altogether and the thumb or thumb and finger approach is integral to the tone and playing style of artists as diverse as Wes Montgomery, Mark Knopfler and Jeff Beck. However, few of us play with our fingers exclusively.

If you want to understand how much of an effect that picks have on a tone, spend some time working in a recording studio. If you do, you'll notice how a guitar passed from one player to another can sound very different. Same guitar, same amp, same room... same everything – so how can this be? Well, in our experience, it's often the plectrum.

Picks can have a massive influence on the attack, solidity and tonal balance of your sound

For starters, picks can have a massive influence on the attack, solidity and tonal balance of your sound, and it's more noticeable with acoustics than electrics. There are various factors in play here, including stiffness, shape, size and the material the pick is made from. Even so, guitarists tend to approach plectrums in the same way that they choose strings – they get used to something and then stick with it.

This article is intended to explore the subject of plectrums (or plectra if you want to get formal) in some detail. Perhaps after reading this, you might feel like experimenting – after all, it's cheaper to buy a handful of different plectrums than it is to buy a set of strings.

Size & shape

When you spend a lot of time working with vintage gear, you'll occasionally find equally vintage plectrums hiding away in old guitar cases, and you may notice that many are large and triangular rather than the medium sized teardrop shape we're all used to these days. Some are straight-sided with sharp

Old-style plectrums often had a triangular shape, whereas modern ones tend to be more of a teardrop

points, while others have rounded sides and corners.

These were widely used in the 1960s and Les Paul found them easier to grip with his arthritic fingers in his later years. Still widely available, you can order them online if your local shop doesn't stock them. We find they produce a clear but bold tone and if you like to palm your pick, these are easy to tuck up and retrieve.

The shape can also make a difference to tone and sharply pointed picks tend to sound brighter than a more rounded pick of the same thickness. You can prove this by strumming a chord with the pointed end of a plectrum, and then spinning it around to play the same chord with one of the more rounded corners. The pointed end will sound brighter. Stevie Ray Vaughan was known to play with the rounded corners.

Many jazzers prefer very small plectrums, finding that they help with speed and accuracy. Sharp edges can also help plectrums slide smoothly off the strings, which can also facilitate speed. The range of shapes and sizes is enormous and the only way to find out what works for you is to try things out. But don't make hasty judgements, because changing picks – especially if it involves a big change in shape and size – may require some adjustment time.

Material

The earliest picks were probably quills, or pieces of wood or bone, but when the flatpick became popular, tortoiseshell (or more accurately turtle shell) became the material of choice. In order to protect the Hawksbill turtle, the use of its shell became illegal in 1973, and quite right, too!

It's claimed by some that tortoiseshell is the ultimate for tone and some players have squirrelled away stashes of tortoiseshell picks for recording. However since the ban, a wide variety of alternative pick materials claiming to have similar properties have found varying degrees of popularity.

Initially, celluloid was found to be a decent substitute and buffalo horn is considered to sound tortoiseshell-like. There is also Red Bear's keratin-based synthetic tortoiseshell and legally farmed tortoiseshell, but both tend to be on the expensive side.

Ivory is obviously banned but, believe it or not, you can buy picks made from Mammoth ivory. Tagua palm tree nuts, also known as vegetable ivory, can be worked into plectrums.

From there you can break things down into various types of plastic, including nylon and acrylic. Various metals can be used, such as copper, silver, aluminium and brass, as well as numerous varieties of hardwood. Also consider glass, carbon fibre, semi-precious stones, mother of pearl and coconut shell.

The flexibility and surface of these materials contribute to the tones they produce when used as guitar picks. Rougher surfaces will be easier to grip but they won't slide off the strings easily and that can produce extraneous noises as well as slowing your picking down. Picks that are very hard and smooth can produce a glassy and clicky tone, but may become slippery in sweaty hands.

Thickness

This is the crucial one because for most players it has the biggest impact on tone and feel. As a rule of thumb, thin plectrums produce the brightest tone and as picks get thicker, the tone shifts to the midrange and treble becomes less apparent. As discussed, shape also has a bearing but assuming material, shape and size remain constant, the rule holds true.

It's interesting to consider why thin picks sound brighter and the bright tone of sharply pointed picks provides a clue. A sharp plectrum excites more upper harmonics than plucking a string with the fleshy part of a finger. Like a finger, a hard pick acts on a relatively wide area of a string, so the string is bent to a softer angle.

As a thin plectrum is pressed against a string, the string is deflected as usual but the plectrum bends along with the string. So the bend angle ends up being quite sharp and the tone is therefore brighter. However although sharp and thin plectrums both sound bright,

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thin plectrums can sound 'slappy' as they're raked across the strings and this can be problematic when recording.

For fast and hard strumming patterns, a thin plectrum can free up your playing because its flexibility allows it to glide across the strings more smoothly. However, the flexibility can be an issue when you need to play fast and precise licks and solos. It's almost as if there's an unpredictability about the position of the pick's tip – so precision suffers. This perhaps explains why so few jazzers and shredders play with thin picks – Pat Metheny and Paul Gilbert being notable exceptions.

Beyond a certain degree of thickness, a pick's shape and composition start to have more bearing on tone. For instance bone and metal picks have no flexibility whatsoever but a squeaky ping may be detected at the front end of notes that helps cut and definition with high gain.

The downside can be a scratchy quality when you attempt rhythm parts other than straight ahead power chords and the extra effort needed to pass an ultra stiff plectrum across the strings can cause an increaser in wrist tension, which in turn can have a detrimental effect on playing feel.

Most players settle on a compromise thickness that works for rhythm and lead. However, an awareness of what works for different playing styles – and indeed different guitars – can improve your playing and tone if you're prepared to pick the plectrum for the job at hand.

For fast and hard strumming patterns, a thin plectrum can free up your playing

Get a grip

Beginners often struggle to hold on to a plectrum. It's hardly surprising when most picks are so smooth and slippery. For most of us using a pick eventually becomes second nature, but even some experienced players still drop them. The tricky part is getting a firm enough grip on the plectrum without tensing up your hand and wrist.

This is a problem that's obviously acknowledged by pick manufacturers and various methods are used to make plectrums easier to grip. Good old Herco Flex picks have always been easy to grip because the mouldings create a roughed up surface above the smooth string contact area.

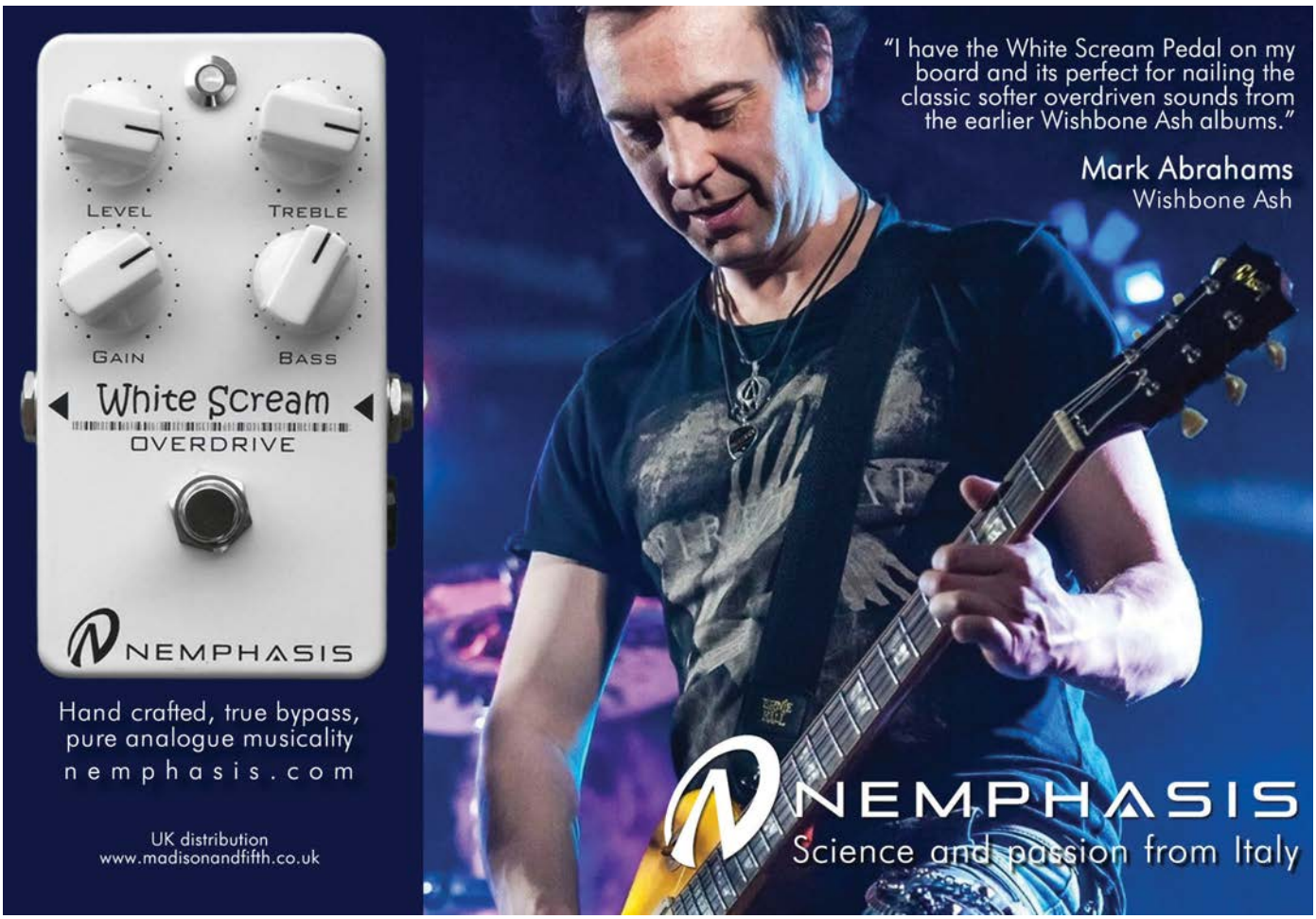
Other grip-enhancing methods include holes in various patterns cut through the centre and diagonal striations – as seen on Wegen's wonderful gypsy jazz picks. If the pick is thick enough, manufacturers will even carve or mould a concave hollow for the thumb and a finger channel for the index finger. The best example of this is probably Dugain and their picks are arguably the most ergonomic of all plectrums.

If none of these methods work, you can also try grip aids such as Monster Grips adhesive silicone pads and the delightfully named Gorilla Snot Pick Honey.

Taking your pick

In summary, there are various factors to consider in the search for the perfect plectrum. The best pick for your tone may not be the best for your playing style and as you get older, the ability to keep hold of the thing might become just as important as tone.

We'll finish up with an observation from guitarist Henry Olsen, who helped a great deal with this feature and is a man who knows a great deal about plectrums: whether you pay five pence or £50 for a plectrum, losing your favourite is just as easy! Wise words.



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Chord Clinic

Sometimes moving simple chord shapes around the guitar can lead to satisfying musical outcomes – **ROD FOGG** explores the two-fingered guitar...

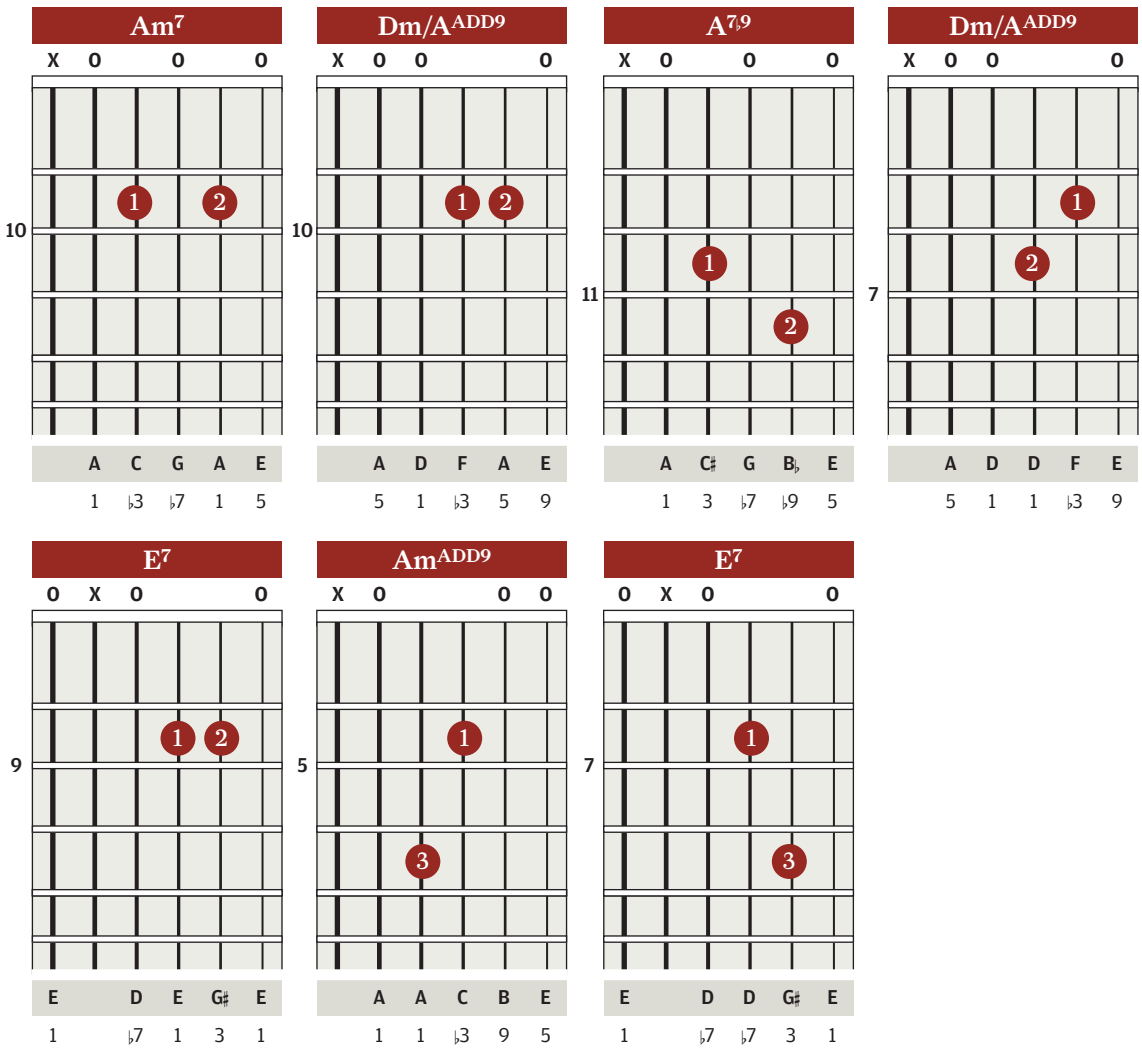
The trickiest thing you'll need to master for this month's Chord Clinic is keeping your fret hand fingers on their tips so that the open strings can ring where required. It is also a good idea to be tidy with your picking hand, so that each chord gets the correct bass note. Other than that, there are no big stretches, no awkward fingerings and not one chord that uses more than two fingers. There are, however, dreamy soundscapes, interesting added note chords and guitar colours that you might not normally come across.

Figure 1 is a series of seven chords to be played as an eight-bar chord sequence, so you end up back on the first chord. Pick slowly, playing loose and free arpeggios starting with the specified bass note and aim to avoid the open A string when you are playing the two E7 chords. Try it on your electric with a touch of modulation – chorus, flange or phase all work well in this style. A touch of tremolo can be effective, too, and it might be worthwhile adding some delay and/or reverb into the mix. Aim to let the notes ring on and overlap as much as possible – this, after all, is your chance to create the dreamy soundscape mentioned above.

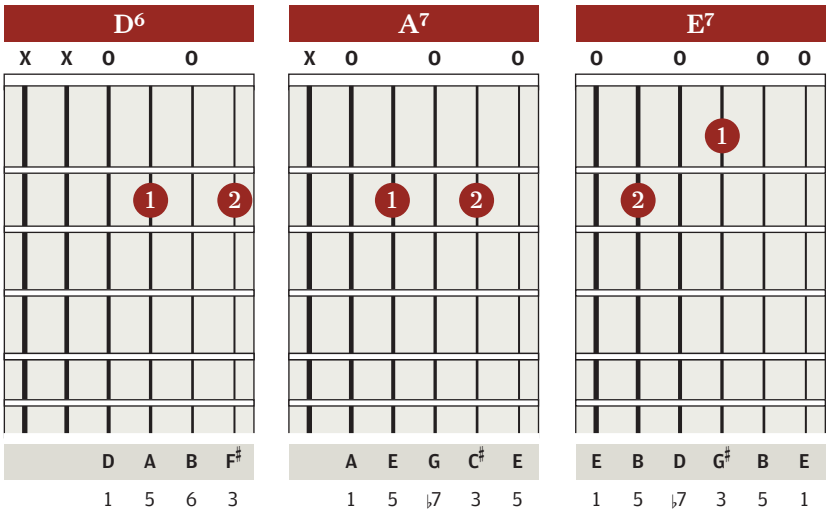
You can finger-pick figure 2, but you might have better results with some light funky strumming. You might also find it easier to finger the first two chords with fingers two and three instead of one and two – it all depends how narrowly spaced your guitar strings are and how big your fingers are. The idea is to strum the D6 and A7 chords back and forth three times (making six bars) and then go for the E7 chord for two bars to round off an eight bar chord sequence. On the first two chords try sliding into the shape from the fret below as you strum to add a little funky bounce the start of each bar.

Figure 3 continues the two-finger theme with a VI-II-V-I sequence in the key of G, which is intended for strumming but also

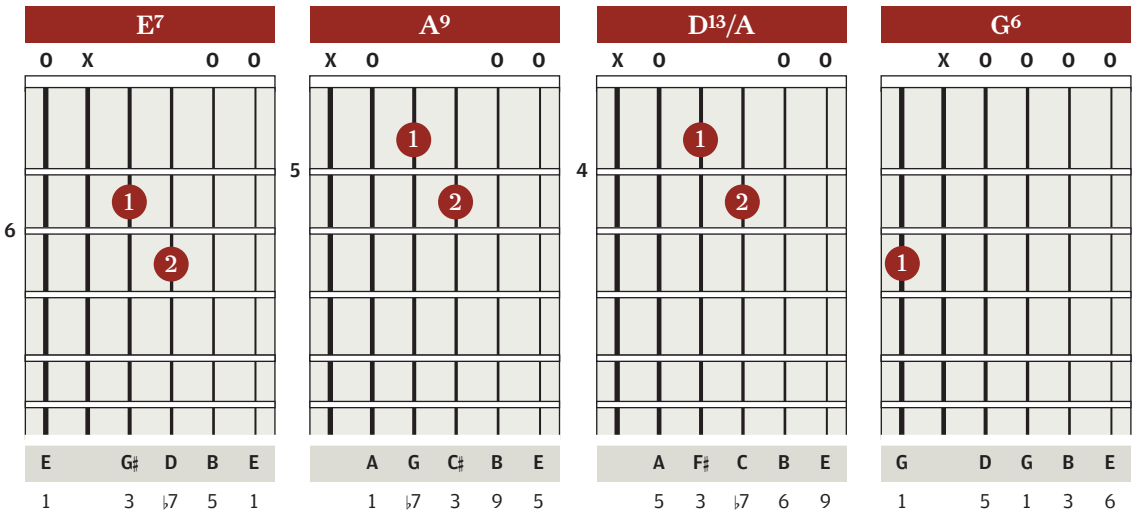
Seven as eight (Fig 1)



Funky strumming (Fig 2)

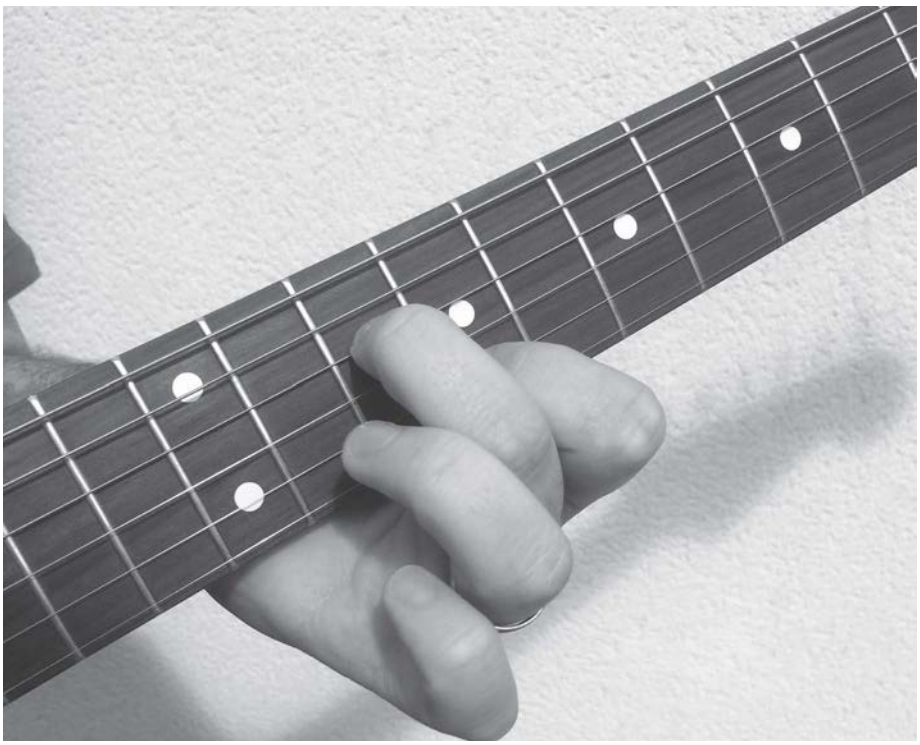


Continuing the theme (Fig 3)



works well with a ragtime-style alternating bass. That means playing the bass note and the note on the D string on alternate beats of the bar with your thumb, pick or thumb pick. Use the other fingers of your picking hand to play the notes on the top three strings, either all at once or as an arpeggio. You have to be a little flexible on how to name chords such as these – the D13 chord doesn't actually contain the note D as it has been replaced by the open A string. Also, notice that the final chord needs just one fret-hand finger; this big open G6 chord sounds great as long as you mute the A string with the underside of your finger.

Next up, we start off with what looks like a major version of figure 1, but figure 4 heads off in a different direction, passing through G6/A to create a four bar sequence ending on Dadd9/A – that's "D add nine with A bass" or optionally "D add nine with A". It can help sometimes to be clear about the names of these more complex chords, as that way we guitarists get better at communicating with each other. Written down, it can look a little like algebra. This example sounds great

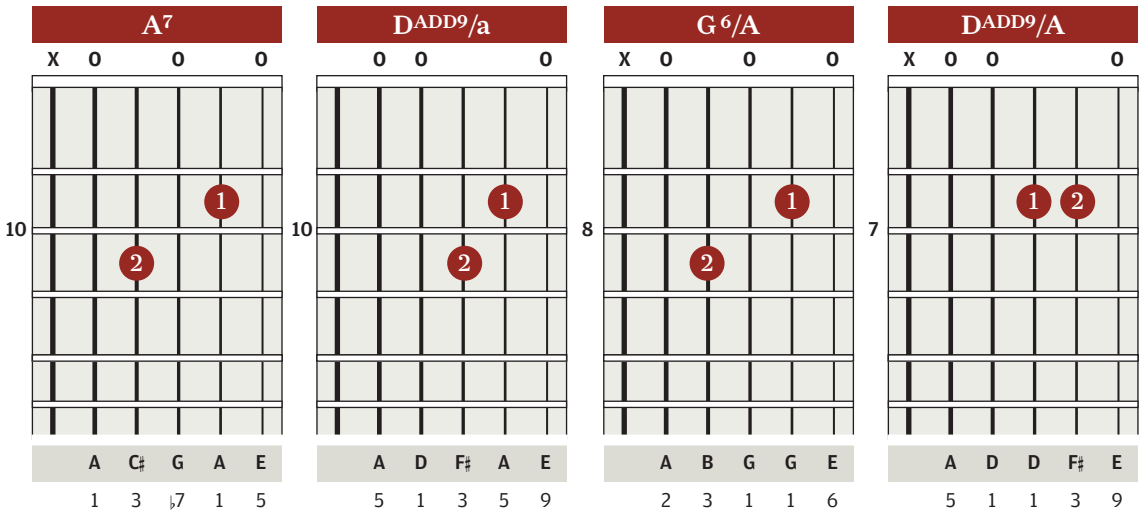


strummed, or you can layer up the effects pedals and play in a similar style to figure 1.

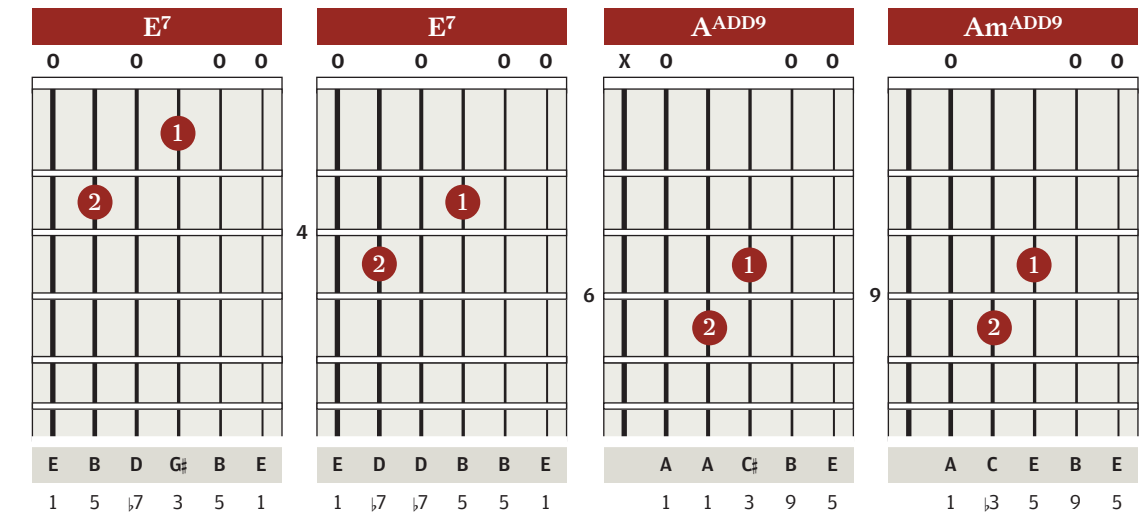
Finally, figure 5 revisits the E7 chord from figure 2 and uses it as a departure point for a chord sequence heading first to A major add9 and then to A minor add9. This one would probably sound great on a big boomy acoustic like a dreadnought or a jumbo with some vigorous strumming. It is a good example of how you can just grab a shape and switch it around on the guitar until you hit something that sounds good.

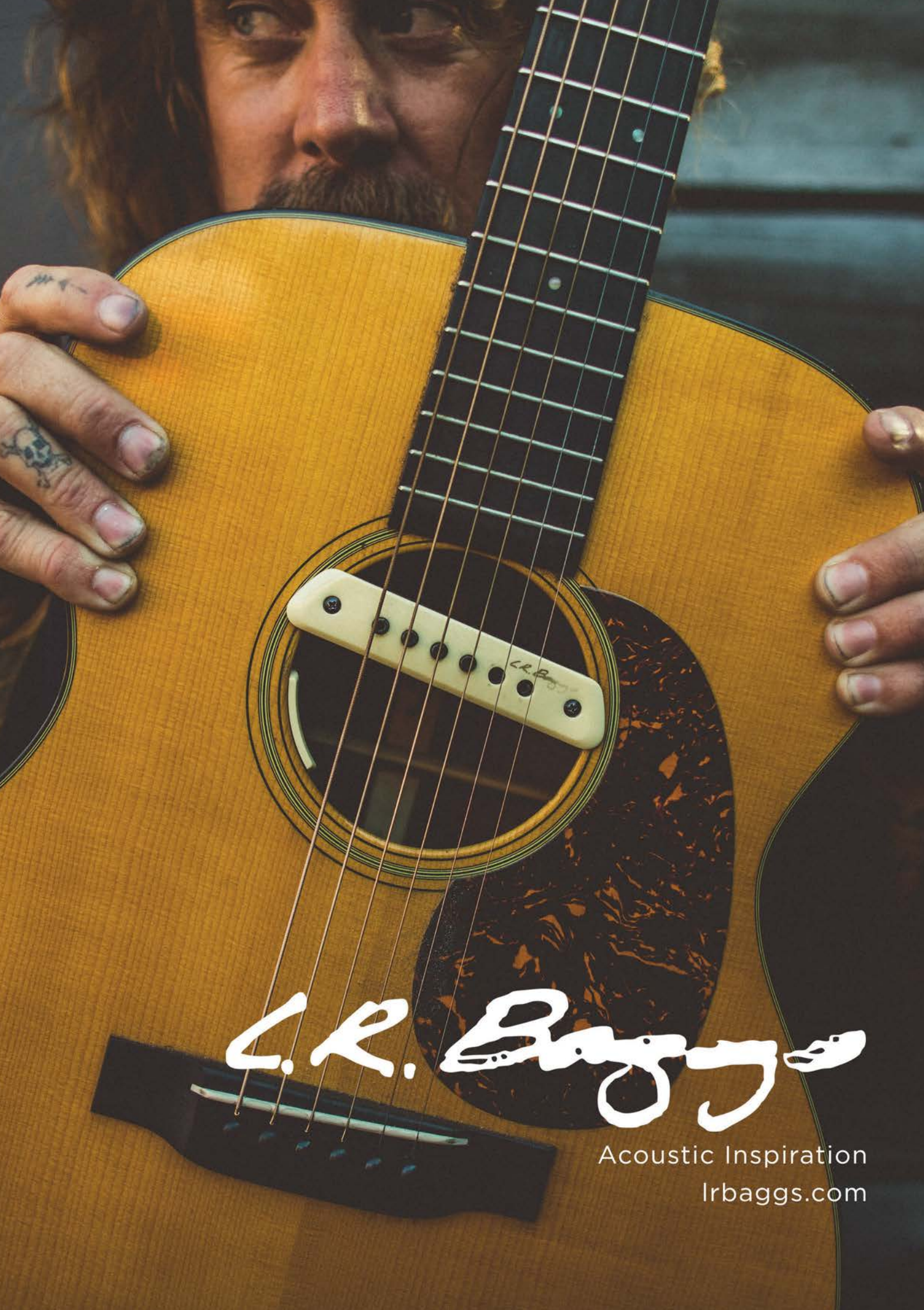
Hopefully, you feel inspired to try to invent some of these two finger shapes for yourself, as there is still a lot of territory on the guitar we have not covered. For example, try starting on the first shape from figure 2; slide it around, alter it if need be, and see where it takes you. Grab a piece of paper and scribble down any good chord shapes you discover. Maybe you could use them next time you are in a songwriting session and be able to offer up some exciting new ideas. Have a great month, see you next time!

A different direction (Fig 4)



A departure point (Fig 5)

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: the importance of ears, ill-advised double-neck conversions and lightweight gigging needs

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Here's to ears!

Dear *TGM*, It was great to hear that Paul Gilbert still plays live using the cheap foam earplugs that are readily available. It would have been tragic for us and him if he couldn't play live anymore, as he is definitely one of the best shredders to have come out of the 1980s.

I too have had to learn to gig with the little yellow plugs in my ears for the last 30 years. I say 'learn' because you do lose perspective with where you sit in the mix and you definitely have set your tone before putting the earplugs in! But without them I would have been finished a long time ago as I became hyper-sensitive to volume.

But my advice to others is to try and play with earplugs in before you damage your ears! At the very least for rehearsals and when you go other gigs protect your ears because once the damage is done, there is little chance of your hearing being repaired. And if you end up like me (and I suspect Paul Gilbert) hyper-sensitive to noise – it affects your everyday life, too.

For those who have tried the foam earplugs and thought they muffle the sound too much, try this experiment. Just fit one to one ear and at the end of the night pull it out: I think you will be shocked by how much your unprotected ear will have been affected by the noise.
Keith Marriott, via email

TGM You're quite right Keith – we might joke about ringing ears at gigs, but damaging your hearing is no joke. As musicians it's the most important sense we have, and we should all take care to not expose ourselves to damaging levels of volume on a regular basis. Foam plugs work for many, but there are loads of more hi-tech solutions available these days, many of which can attenuate the harmful frequencies without making the sound muffled and mushy. If you're playing with a full band or blasting loud amps regularly, they're an essential purchase, so be sure to investigate.

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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The Line 6 Helix will do all your amps and effects in one lightweight unit

Double Trouble

Dear *TGM,* I read with interest your article on 12-string guitars last month, as I have both acoustic and electric 12-strings, the latter having an interesting history.

Rickenbacker is the name that most people associate with electric 12s but they are rather quirky and the narrow neck can be a challenge. For my money the Burns Double Six was hard to beat for both sound and playability. I'm really surprised that they were not seen more often.

Mine was bought second-hand around 1978 and was probably about 10-15 years old by then. Sadly, among the many stupid things I did as a young man, I got a local luthier to convert this and my Burns Split Sonic into a Double-neck. A decision that I regretted almost immediately when I realised that it weighed 14lbs and was alarmingly neck-heavy! The guitar ended up dismantled under the bed and largely forgotten until last year when I decided to have a go at assembling my own guitar from parts using the neck from the Burns. It is no work of art but as someone with few DIY skills I am quite pleased with the result. It plays well with a low action and most importantly for a 12-string, stays in tune!
Tim Bliss, Cornwall

How Very Arch

Hi *TGM,* How about a special on archtops for all of us older but loyal readers? There are many like myself who rocked in the 70s but now pursue a more jazz style of playing, but still love reading the magazine.
Stephen Fewell, Australia

Lighten The Load

Dear *TGM*, I have been reading your magazine for about a year and I subscribed in February, so I'm a fairly new reader. However, over the last few months I have encountered quite a few health problems which severely limit my strength, so much that I'm now playing a Mustang with Ernie Ball 0.008s. I used to use a Fender Blues Deluxe for my main gigging amp but now I can't lift it at all. This means I need a new solution for gigging and I'm not sure where to start. Bearing in mind that it needs to be versatile, do you have any advice on what I should be looking at? Thanks for the fantastic reading!
Dan, via email

Sorry to hear that, Dan, and you're not alone in wanting to find a more lightweight and portable gigging solution. Orange's Tiny Terror and Mesa/Boogie's TransAtlantic (if you can find one) heads provide real valve power in a light and portable package – you could pair either of them with a lightweight 1x10 or 1x12 cab to make the whole thing a bit more manageable. If you're looking for maximum versatility, however, then the digital route might be the best option. Line 6's Helix will do all of your amp and effects modelling in a floor board, while Kemper's Profiler and Fractal's Axe-Fx will also provide all the sounds you need. These options will require you to DI into the PA if you want to get the best out of them, but if you're playing gigs with decent monitoring, then it could be the best route.

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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven releases and reissues

The National
SLEEP WELL BEAST

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

2013's *Trouble Will Find Me* was a watershed moment for The National, as the Ohio indie-rock darlings cemented their place as a band that could bother the upper echelons of the charts on both sides of the Atlantic, and earn Grammy nominations and widespread critical acclaim in the process. In the years since, the band opted to disperse to various corners of the globe to pursue an eclectic array of side projects, but came back together last year at guitarist Aaron Dessner's New York State studio to craft the follow-up.

That the time apart has clearly impacted the sound of *Sleep Well Beast*, and that's especially evident with the creative fulcrum of Aaron and Bryce Dessner. The guitar-toting producer twins explored a varied slate of production, composition and curation work in the last few years, and it's clearly pushed them in a more experimental direction – with loops, electronic beats and moody synths punctuating these 12 tracks in a way we've not seen before.

That's not to say that the pair have forgotten their roots, however, and this is still a thoughtful guitar record that takes you on a varied journey as they accompany the unmistakable baritone vocal stylings of frontman, Matt Berninger.

The gentler moments recall the moody atmospheric lines of *Trouble Will Find Me*, from *Walk It Back*'s single-note refrain, to the delicate reverb swells of *Empire Line* – while new ground is broken with the hypnotic beat-sync'd arpeggiator weirdness that closes out *Born To Beg*.

It's not all low-key, however, and at key moments the pair flex their six-string muscles. Lead single, *The System Dreams In Total Darkness*, features a wonderfully ramshackle guitar solo that owes a debt to Neil Young, while *Day I Die*'s piercing, urgent repeated three-note figure drives one of the album's most energetic moments forward.

Frustratingly, the record's most guitar-heavy track might be its only real misstep. *Turtleneck* is a gloriously scuzzy and obnoxious three-minute guitar duel… but the song behind it feels like an awkward gestalt of *Alligator*'s rawness and the sleazy cynicism of Berninger's EL VY side project.

This isn't an album that's going to propel The National to stadium-filling superstardom, but you sense that was never really the point. It's designed to challenge and reassure fans in equal measure – feeding fresh textures through their uniquely morose prism, and pushing the band's sound into new areas. **JG**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: ***The Shins, The War On Drugs***

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER
HALLELUJAH ANYHOW

His Golden Messenger's sixth studio album, *Heart Like A Levee*, was one of the most pleasant surprises of last year. MC Taylor brought a confessional honesty to his folky arrangements that elevated them to new heights. Following so soon after, it's no surprise that *Hallelujah Anyhow* has a similar vibe – in fact, you'd be forgiven for thinking that these tracks were recorded in the same sessions. That's not necessarily a bad thing of course, and there's plenty of opportunity to appreciate some classy guitar playing from Taylor, not least some vibey syncopated lines on *John The Gun* and delightfully scuzzy harmonica accompaniment on *Gulfport You've Been On My Mind*. But if we got the best of Taylor last year, this feels a little like the material that didn't quite make the cut first time around. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *City And Colour, Ryley Walker*

CHRIS REA
ROAD SONGS FOR LOVERS

After 26 studio albums, we know exactly what to expect from the Middlesbrough slide maestro by now – even the title is none more Rea. But the gravel-voiced guitarist knows what he's good at, and he gives us to it in spades – bittersweet ballads, layered with lashings of sublime electric slide playing. *Happy On The Road* sets the formula from practically the opening note, as Rea's gritty slide wails over the top of a four on the floor blues, eventually erupting into a wailing solo. That's not to say there aren't diversions, the jazzy groove of *Money* is nicely punctuated by myriad horns, while the smoky soul of *Rock My Soul* is driven along by lashings of Hammond. But the soaring power of his slide is never far away, and when it arrives in force, as on *The Road Ahead*, it's a reminder of what a fine exponent of the genre he is. **GJ**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Mark Knopfler, Gary Moore*

BLACK COUNTRY COMMUNION
BCCIV

Three years after the supergroup imploded, the key players – Joe Bonamassa, Glenn Hughes, Jason Bonham and Derek Sherinian – are back for album four, but is it a welcome reunion? It certainly seems to have invigorated Bonamassa, producing some of the most interesting guitar work the blues supremo has ever committed to record. This is JoBo in full rock mode, with the thumping riff and muscular solo of opening track *Collide* channelling Audioslave, ably assisted by Hughes' formidable pipes. It's the album's strongest statement however, and the following nine tracks see the band wear their influences on their sleeves, from Whitesnake to Alice In Chains. *BCCIV* hops genres rather readily, and while Joe's fans will delight in hearing him stretch his rock and metal muscles – there's even a bit of country on *Love Remains* – it sometimes feels that a little continuity would have made for a more triumphal comeback. **JG**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Whitesnake, Soundgarden*

SIMO
RISE & SHINE

There's an argument to be made that JD Simo and company are the hardest working band around. They played 215 shows in nine countries last year, and perhaps that relentless schedule has caused them to appreciate the opportunity to chill out in the studio, as there's definitely a more laid back vibe here than last year's *Let Love Show The Way*. The 60s psych vibes of *Shine* reflect a band, and a guitar player, that are both more confident in themselves and what they do. There's a more soulful sound than the in-your-face blues-rock we've seen from them in the past, to such an extent that *I Want Love* is an R&B-tinged power ballad that could have come from a Gary Clark Jr album. That's not to say that Simo has forgotten why people pay their money at the door, and his incendiary guitar solos are never far away, but it's peppered with more delicate moments that add welcome elements of light and shade. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Philip Sayce, Gary Clark Jr*

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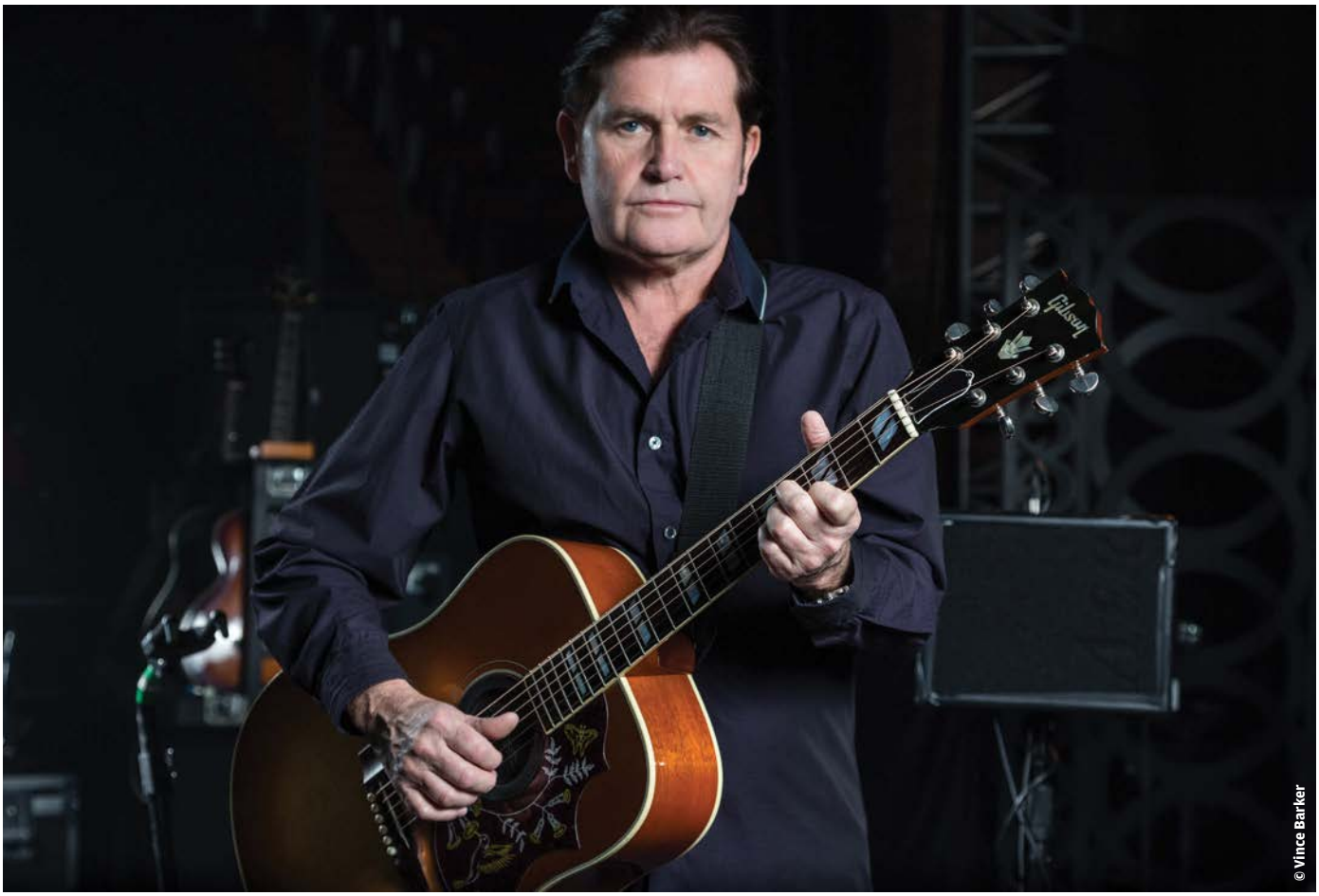


Charlie Burchill

Simple Minds' musical brain talks White Falcons, flying keyboards and prog wizardry

1 I couldn't live without my...
"Gretsch White Falcon. Well, I've got four, but the one I bought in LA in 1984. It's not just looks with the White Falcon: it is very classy, but it's got a lovely warm sound too. I bought that for *Once Upon A Time*. Wonderful guitar."

2 In another life I would be...
"Mick Ronson. I met him a few times 'cos he produced a band, The Visible Targets, who supported us in the 80s, and he was really sweet. With Mick, it's not just his playing, but his arranging, production, everything. Absolute hero."

3 The moment that started it all...
"My mum got a guitar using tokens you'd get with Embassy cigarettes. I still have it, this rubbish acoustic covered with Embassy stickers. Jim [Kerr] thinks it's symbolic for us. People look at it and say; Oh, that's amazing! It is, until they find out she died of emphysema. The first proper song I learned on it was *Heart Of Gold* by Neil Young."

4 The one that got away...
"Three Gibsons that were stolen. A 1965 Gibson Barney Kessel, a 1969 black Les Paul that was on so many albums, and a Gibson Chet Atkins 12-string, very rare. I've got a hunch who... but I can't say. Amnesty, or kick his head in? I'm saying nothing about that!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"Having the keyboards fall on top of me in Paris. Mick (MacNeil) was rockin' out pretty strong and his keyboard stack fell off the riser, right on top of me. I can't remember the song. I *can* remember shouting: 'what thae *fuck*?!'"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Don't split up! There's always daft things that you go through... but Jim [Kerr] and I just decided early on: we weren't going to split up."

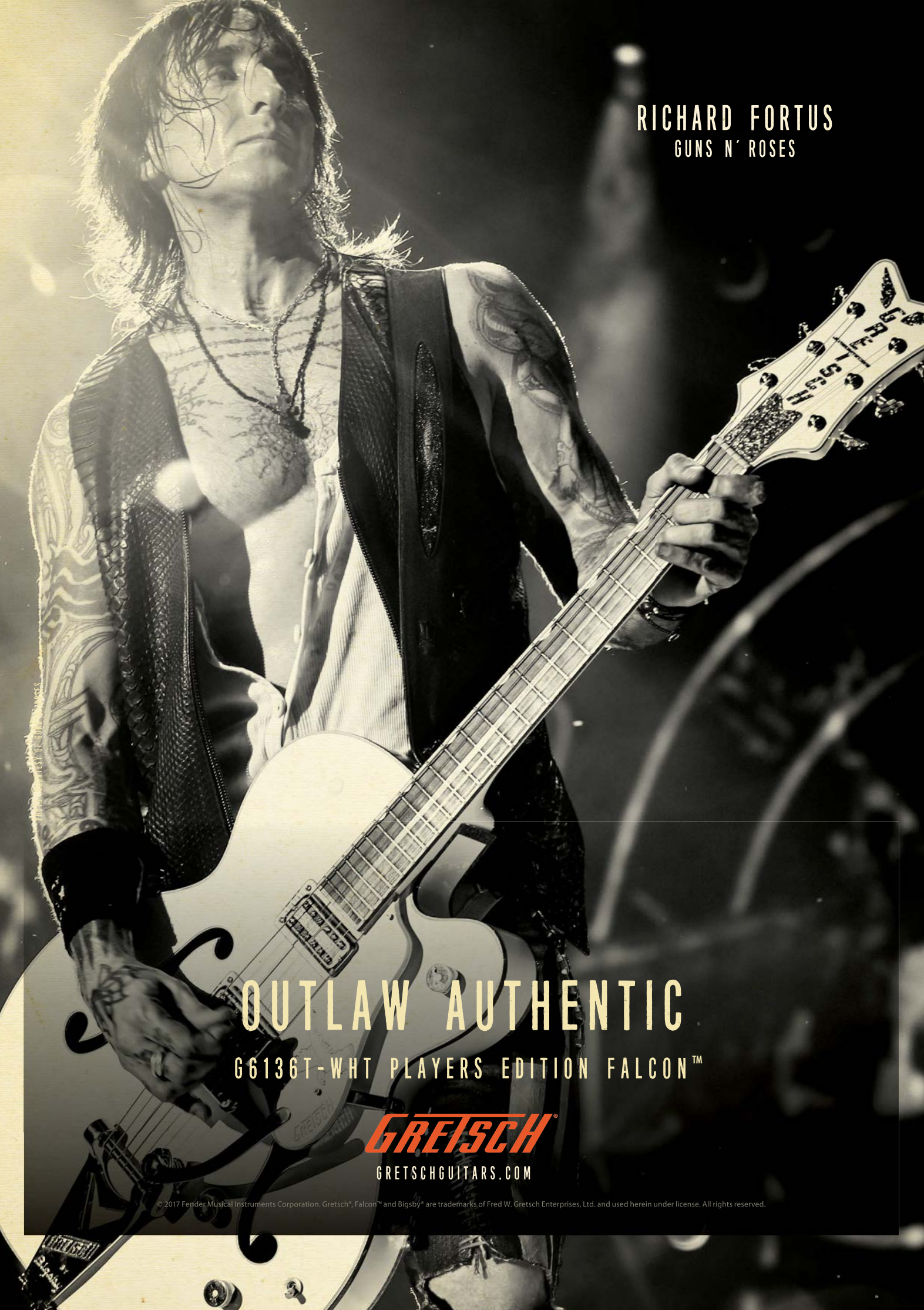
7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"The Clap by Steve Howe. I tried so hard to learn it when I was young, and couldn't, so once I did... now I play it all the time."

8 The most important thing on your rider...
"Oh, nothing rock 'n' roll these days. Chewing gum, maybe? We chuck packs at each other."

9 My musical guilty pleasure...
"Prog rock. You've probably guessed, but early Yes in particular. The *Fragile* album is amazing. We couldn't say it when Simple Minds came out, it wasn't cool. But it's okay now. The first gig I saw was Led Zeppelin."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"The violin. I've tried to play: terrible. I've even played it on albums as well, Jim insists I get it out: dreadful. So I wish I could play violin properly. As for guitar, some of Joni Mitchell's songs in her different tunings are amazing. I can't play like that."

Simple Minds' latest album, *Acoustic*, is out now on Caroline International



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